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EDUCATION AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VALUES

by

© JOSEPH DONATUS OKOH

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Education and African Traditional Values submitted by Joseph Donatus Okoh in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Philosophy of Education.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of education in colonized Black Africa was to develop the Africans on European lines by means of massive diffusion of Western values; the objective was to produce Black-Europeans. Although the countries of West Africa on which this thesis focus have all attained political independence, the task of working out an alternative value-education which departs from the customary imitation of European models has hardly begun. Education in Africa cannot be truly liberating as long as the mental attitude and habits of the educated Africans are, at best, cheap imitations of their ex-colonial masters.

The main thrust of this thesis is to analyze and examine certain points concerning values within the African context, and to stress how these could be the basis of a transformation in an African philosophy of education. The analysis proceeds by identifying the justification for an African value theory that comes from two main areas; theoretical and social. The theoretical aspect focuses on the clarification of philosophical concepts, such as the African understanding of the nature of man, what constitutes value to the African, and the traditional notions of time, causality and evil. An attempt is made to relate the discussion on value to the objective of self-realization and to show how this objective might be obtained by conserving the best values

of indigenous education and uniting them with the values of modern schooling.

The social dimension of the study views the African as a socio-historical being. In the past, the African socio-historical situation was not regarded as a matter of central consideration in educational judgment. Part of the function of this thesis is to arouse the consciousness of educational planners to the need of evolving a new paradigm of value-education based on an in-depth knowledge of African history and way of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gradtitude for the guidance and willing assistance of a number of persons that made this study possible.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Western man has always had to resist the prejudice of inquiring into the Black African way of life while regarding his own philosophical presuppositions, his concepts of man and his world view, as normative for human beings in general. Little wonder that for many centuries the Westerner was unable to conceive of the Black African as having any sense of value. Leo Frobenius asserted that "none but the most primitive instincts determine the lives and conduct of the negroes, who lacked every kind of ethical inspiration."[1] And less than two decades ago, Lord Fredrick Lugard popularized the false hypothesis that the "negroes have no system of ethics and no principle of conduct."[2]

There is no doubt that many centuries of colonial domination did strip the Black African of philosophical or ideological direction. Throughout this period, the European defined the African. First, he was a savage, one to be despised; then he was a heathen, one to be saved from the

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[1] Leo Frobenius, The Voice of Africa. (London: Frank Cass, 1913), Vol. 1, p. xiii.

[2] Fredrick Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa. (London: Frank Cass, 1965), p. 437.

clutches of the devil; then he was unintelligent, one to be indoctrinated.[3]

Today however, the Blacks are in the process of defining themselves. This thesis is an aspect of the ongoing process of the definition of the peoples of Black Africa by themselves. If Black Africa is to have educational institutions which are in consonance with her renaissance, then the school system must find its roots in the African traditional past. In the words of J.D. Lewis, "whilst education is essentially concerned with the immediate present and the future, it is rooted in the past."[4] The more the Black educator understands about his traditional heritage, the better he understands the present and can plan for the future.

The question is, how is an educator to develop a value-education which genuinely catering to the needs of the Black African youth of today, does not alienate him from his ancestral heritage? Kwame Nkrumah has provokingly described the three competing layers of value systems which constitute present day Black African society as follows:

> African society has one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; it has a second segment which is filled by the presence of the Islamic tradition in Africa; it has a final segment which represents the

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[3] Abdou Moumouni, Education in Africa. (New York: Praeger Press, 1969).

[4] J.D. Lewis, British Contribution to Education in Africa. (Edinborough: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 80.

> infiltration of the christian tradition and culture of Western Europe into Africa, using colonialism and neo-colonialism as its primary vehicles.[5]

How can an Africanized value-education be evolved from these competing value systems?

Before their social evolution was ravaged by colonialism, the peoples of Black Africa once possessed a common pool of values.[6] The crux of this thesis is an attempt to conceptualize a new rationality for an African value-education, based on a reconstruction and up-dating of whatever is noble and humane in the traditional common pool of values. The major issues this study will be addressing itself to are: firstly, to identify and clarify certain concepts about African traditional values; secondly, to point out what modern educationists may learn from the egalitarian and humanist past of Black Africa, and finally, to create an awareness of the need for a paradigm of value-education rooted in African thought and tradition.

Rationale for the Study

With the emergence of political independence for more and more Black African nation-states,[7] there is a crying need

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[5] Kwame Nkrumah, Some Essential Features of Nkrumaism. (Accra: The Spark Publications, 1964), p. 47.

[6] Kwame Nkrumah, Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology of Decolonialisation and Development. (London: Heinemann Books, 1964), pp. 54 ff.

[7] Ndabaningi Sithole, African Nationalism. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

for research studies in the area of African philosophy in general, and traditional patterns of evaluation in particular. The outcome of such research studies would not only give a rational basis for Black African self-identity, but would also provide a conceptual frame of reference for a Black philosophy of education.

To adopt a Western theory of value, apart from being paternalistic, is a-historical.[8] No Western value theories can adequately reflect the socio-cultural milieu of the peoples of Africa. In fact, there is a sense in which a traditional egalitarian value system could be considered revolutionary if juxtaposed with colonial capitalist theories of value. There are broad differences, as will be developed in the course of this thesis, between the way the African sees values, and theories of value in the European sense. Perhaps as Risieri Frondizi has critically remarked, "differences in value theory are basic to ideological clash."[9] Also, Ralph B. Perry makes a very pertinent point concerning the question of differences in value theories in the following statement:

> Once theory of value meant the search for the good, the quest of that good, if any, which is attainable and

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[8] The Unesco Report: 'Learning to Be' makes the point that where in the Third World, educational models and value systems have been copied from foreign models, serious anomalies appear. See G. Faure, Loc Cit., Paris, 1973.

[9] Risieri Frondizi, What is Value? Introduction to Axiology. Trans. Solomon Lipp. (Lassale: Open Court, 1963), p. xi.

> secure. Today it springs from a sort of embarrassment of riches. How shall a man choose from what is offered him? How shall conflict be reduced or eliminated? The problem, in other words, is that of establishing a principle of selection and a method of reconciliation by which order and harmony shall be brought out of a bewildering chaos and confusion of values.[10]

Within the African context, the value crisis becomes more perplexing because of the "assimilationist"[11] colonial policy of acculturation which nipped in the bud every effort to maintain authentic indigenous value systems. Hence today the African youth who must choose and who must adopt values is bewildered as to what are the appropriate choices to make. In the rapidly changing Black continent, formal education, to adapt the words of Gail M. Inlow, "is remiss if students in too great numbers leave school without, at their levels of readiness, knowing what the governing values of their culture are."[12] It therefore becomes necessary to re-examine certain basic traditional concepts as they relate to the African and his world view. This will enable us to understand the context in which such concepts have developed and to refer them more relevantly to the experience of the peoples of Black Africa, past, present and to come.

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[10] Ralph B. Perry, General Theory of Value: Its Meanings and Basic Principles. (New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1926), p. 13.

[11] For more detailed information about the "assimilationist" colonial policy in Black Africa, I recommend: W.B. Muniford and G.J. Orde-Brown, Africans Learn to be French. (London: Evans Brothers, 1935).

[12] Gail M. Inlow, Values in Transition: A Handbook. (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1972), p. vii.

What people do in a society, their conduct and their aspirations depend upon their fundamental values and ideas involving orientations to reality. The concept of value has profound significance for human life. The essence of the object we value determines the way we live and our reaction to nature. It is our values that define us. In fact, Charles Fried has aptly remarked that "we are our values."[13] Colonialism and neo-colonialism has undermined and eroded traditional African values. As a result, there is a growing feeling of meaninglessness or what Louis L. Klitzke has termed an "existential vacuum," especially among the academic youth in Africa.[14] As traditional values steadily disintegrate, the youths lack any concrete standard to live by. This feeling of futility and emptiness is the theme of much African modern literature.[15] In the words of John Mbiti:

> One of the sources of severe strain for Africans exposed to modern changes is the increasing process (through education, urbanization and industrialization) by which individuals become detached from their traditional environment . . . . They are torn between the life of

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[13] Charles Fried, An Anatomy of Values. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 63.

[14] Louis Klitzke, "Students in Emerging Africa: Humanistic Psychology and Logotherapy in Tanzania." (In American Journal of Humanistic Psychoanalysis. No. ix, 1969), pp. 105-126.

[15] Black African modern literature based on this theme are too many to be listed here. I refer interested readers to the work of: J.A. Ramsaran, New Approaches to African Literature. (Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1970).

> their forefathers which whatever else might be said about it, has historical roots and firm traditions, and the life of our technological age which, as yet, for many Africans, has no concrete form or depth.[16]

To cope with changing conditions, a critical examination and re-evaluation of traditional value system becomes of great relevance. No values can be regarded as being permanent. They depend on and ought to reflect the stage reached in the social evolution of any society. Apala Chakravarti has remarked that:

> conceptions of moral virtues and values vary according to time and place. A society needs to revise its ideas when its conditions undergo distinctive changes, when its people no more feel or act in the traditional way.[17]

It is the intention of this thesis to point the way to a new philosophical direction, which will require Black educators to forge new guidelines and to develop new concepts and attitudes out of the depth of our ancestral experience. It is only as traditional structures are critically examined and challenged that radical changes can take place and usher in a more humane goal of human life and international solidarity.

Delimitations of the Study

This thesis deals with the negroid peoples South of

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[16] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969), p. 3.

[17] Apala Chakravarti, The Idealist Theory of Value. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1966), p. xxi.

the Sahara, with particular reference to those areas which the Berlin Conference of 1885 designated respectively as British and French West Africa.[18] The former British West Africa include the present day independent nations of: Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo. The independent nations of Dahomey (Benin), Guinea, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Upper Volta and Niger were included in the former French West African colonies.

Although we do recognize the pluralism of African society, yet as J.A. Ramsaran has stated, "a case can be made out on ethnic and historical grounds for some kind of homogeneity of the autochthonous peoples of this area South of the Sahara."[19] In an age when modern communications and news media have broken down barriers, it is now clearer than ever before that those things that unite Black Africa are, by far, more than those things that separate her peoples.

There are four basic traditional communal institutions that make up the fabric of the African's life. These four institutions, viz: the family, the tribal community, religion and the traditional "school without walls," constitute the hard core of the traditional African value system.[20] These

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[18] J.D. Hargreaves, Prelude to the Partition of West Africa. (London: Macmillan, 1963).

[19] J.A. Ramsaran, New Approaches to African Literature. (Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1970), p. x.

[20] Edwin W. Smith, Knowing the African. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1946), pp. 29-74.

foursome set up areas of mutual understandings; they give rise to the dominant sanctions which are common to almost all Black communities, in spite of the plurality of languages and local customs. Throughout the length and breadth of Black Africa, there is tremendous potential values embedded in these communal institutions. As a result, the habits that set an African apart from a non-African are usually ingrained within these four communal institutions rather than in any particular national or local cultural patterns.

Albert Memmi has observed that "all colonized people have much in common . . . that all the oppressed are alike in some ways."[21] During the era of colonization, the peoples of West Africa became habituated to similar foreign ideas and modes of acculturation. As a result, the vast majority of those who passed through the colonial school system were indoctrinated to become "Black Europeans": they were educated not to think or act in the traditional way and they were actively encouraged to reject traditional values.[22] The hypothesis of a common problem of value faced by the peoples of West Africa, especially since the cessation of colonial rule, sets the field for this study.

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[21] Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized. (New York: Beacon Press, 1972), p. ix.

[22] Suslav Jahoda, White Man: A Study of Attitudes of Africans to Europeans in Ghana. (Accra: Oxford University Press, 1961).

Review of Related Literature

The exposition of value theory pursued in this thesis is necessarily an interpretative construct. This is so because no formal studies have so far been done in this area. John Mbiti, himself a pioneer writer in the field of African philosophy, has stated that "African notions of morality, ethics and justice have not been fully studied, and many books either do not mention them or do so only in passing."[23]

I have had to rely heavily on the literature of liberation which has aroused the consciousness of Black Africa and other oppressed peoples of the world. Apart from the Black African writers Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nkame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, Sekou Toure and Julius Nyerere, the writings of Paulo Friere, Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi have provided the inspiration and impetus for this thesis.

It could, however, be rightly assumed that this thesis is the first attempt ever, as far as the author knows, to specifically undertake a philosophical analysis of traditional African value system.

Methodology

The question of concepts and their clarification is very crucial in any discussion of the traditional theory of value. This is true because what we do and what we expect of others is determined by the concepts we associate with words.

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[23] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969), p. 212.

As R.M. Hare has aptly put it: "The key problem is the study of the concepts which have through being misunderstood brought us into perplexity."[24]

Within the African context, A. Bolaji Akinyemi epitomizes the conceptual ambiguities that often arise from different meanings being read into what one would normally term neutral words, like peace, virtue, freedom and so on. In defending the African point of view, Bolaji Akinyemi let it be known that:

> There is no absolute truth, just as there is no neutral fact in international relations. Scholars who analyse politics, history, in fact, any subject in the arts and social sciences, cannot help but do their analysis against their cultural and ideological backgrounds. . . . They are made in the schools, colleges and universities where they are trained. These educational institutions do not operate in vacuum. They operate to instill the values and virtues of the societies in which they exist. Every scholar unconsciously imbibes these values which then become part of his system. Words like "peace," "justice," "freedom" and so many other words which have ordinary sensible meanings become contentious words in the world of values and in the vocabulary of international relations.[25]

The African traditional concept of man is the corner stone of this thesis. In traditional philosophy, man is regarded as "a being of praxis."[26] Within this perspective, an attempt is made to philosophize on what goals the African

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[24] R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 3.

[25] A. Bolaji Akinyemi, in Nigerian Courier. (Ottawa: Office of High Commission for Nigeria, December, 1976), p. 24.

[26] Nkwame Nkrumah, Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology of Decolonization and Development. (London: Heinemann Books, 1964), p. 276.

pursues, and what motivates him to action.

Following the introductory chapter, the foundation of our study is laid in Chapters 2 and 3, both of which focus on the traditional concept of man and related issues concerning the African world-view. In Chapter 4, an attempt is made to relate value specifically to the Black African historical and cultural experience. The sources of values and the types of morality which form the topics of Chapters 5 and 6 attempt to see traditional African values from within, in their social and historical contexts. Finally, in Chapter 7 and in the concluding chapter, an effort is made to highlight the important role education can play in the total liberation of Black Africa from her present bondage to Western mentality and value system.

Chapter 2

THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF MAN

Theoretical Postulate

W.A. Sinclair has defined philosophy as "the attempt to understand the universe and ourselves and our place in the universe, whether for theoretical interest or for material practical purposes."[1] If this is true, and there is a sense in which it seems very likely, then we are all philosophers in so far as we all have some views about the universe and our place in it. Unfortunately, for many centuries it was presumed that Black Africa was too primitive to have any philosophical concepts about nature, man and society. There has always been the tendency to prescribe industrialism, materialism and rationalism as the measure of all things, including man. For this reason African traditional thought has been rejected on the grounds of primitiveness.

Up until very recently, some Western scholars[2] have tried to inform the world that the pre-industrial man is incapable of logical thought, has only a bizarre imagination and cannot conceive of any sense of ontology. Edwin Smith

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[1] W.A. Sinclair, An Introduction to Philosophy. (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 9.

[2] C. Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

records his revealing conversation with Emil Ludwig in the following paraphrase: Smith had just reported to Ludwig, an eminent philosopher, about how very receptive the Africans were to instructions about God. In a feat of perplexity, Ludwig is quoted as having retorted: "How can the untutored African conceive God? How can this be? . . . Diety is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing."[3] Perhaps the reaction of most well-meaning Black African scholars to such derogatory remarks is most pointedly expressed by J.B. Danquah in his moving protest:

> It is painful, sometimes, to encounter learned men and civilized anthropologists who refuse to believe that non-Europeans, non-Muslim or non-Aryan, or lately non-Japanese races, are capable of any originality which is not merely 'primitive.'[4]

Admittedly, traditional African philosophy is often not able to explain most natural phenomena in terms of defensible scientific theories. Yet the temptation to regard only as valid knowledge those things which pass the standard of experimental science, must be resisted.[5] Knowledge, the truth of which is based on experience and intuition, may also be valid knowledge, even though it lacks scientific experimentation. It is experience that determines theory in

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[3] Edwin Smith, African Ideas of God. (London: Edinborough House Press, 1961), p. 1.

[4] J.B. Danquah, The Akan Doctrine of God. (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 104.

[5] Paul Radin, Primitive Man as Philosopher. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1957).

traditional thought. In contrast, there is a sense, as Robin Horton points out, in which it could be said that theory usually determines experience in Western thought.[6] Joseph Mullin is to be commended for his effort to elucidate how the African thinks and how he conceives of the universe. Mullin writes:

> The African's reasoning methods are not discursive; he knows nothing of the syllogism, he thinks inductively rather than deductively; nor is his thinking analytic: it is intuitive and synthetic. In this sense he is subjective - the word is not used here to suggest in any way that he lacks objectivity. He looks for meaning rather than sign, for the deeper reality rather than the appearance of the object. He feels what he sees; hence his vivid sensibilities and emotions. . . . He identifies himself with nature - the fields about him, his plantation. . . . This is a mentality different from the European and to be respected as such . . . . One consequence of it is a circular manner of thinking, a collecting of impressions, a feeling of the way before coming to the kernel of the problem. . . . A more important consequence is the primacy in his thought of the concrete over the abstract and the human over the institutional.[7]

Instead of trying to cast traditional thought and values in a Western scientific mode, there is the need to evolve a paradigm based specifically on Black African consciousness, and circumscribed by the African socio-cultural and historical reality. The task for any critic of this new paradigm would be to examine the different set of assumptions on which the traditional thought pattern is based in order to

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[6] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science;" in Knowledge and Control. (ed). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971).

[7] Joseph Mullin, The Catholic Church in Modern Africa. (London: G. Chapman, 1958), p. 32.

assess the criteria for its admissability as a valid paradigm of knowledge.

To fully understand the level of traditional African consciousness, it is necessary to adopt the method of participant observation.[8] It is only through participant observation that one can be led into the real life of the African. This is so because participant observation engenders a better comprehension of the cultural and historical realities that condition life in the traditional African society. The way the Black African thinks, the way he acts and, in short, his entire life, is very much historically constituted. Any attempt to interpret the traditional thought without first taking into account the historically structured consciousness of the African and his world view, amounts to an exercise in futility. It is only through participant observation that one is able to observe reality directly as it revolves around some specific historical situations in the life of the farmer, or the hunter, or the fisherman and so on. Placide Temples, in criticizing the neo-positivistic approach of the colonial educators, made the following remark:

> When the missionary stops holding a manual, sometimes after ten years of travels through the bush . . . and for the first time looks at the black man in front of him and asks him: "Who are you? What are you thinking? What do you want?" . . . There is a reaction. This

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[8] Herbert Spiegelberg, "The Essentials of the Phenomenological Method." In the Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction (2nd ed.). The Hague: Martinus Nijoff, 1965), Vol. 11, pp. 650-700.

> negro, like any other human being, feels overwhelmed at being the object of a sincere interest. Until now, he had met only a preacher of "something" . . . or a propagandist for a certain organization.[9]

The attitude of mind and the perception behind the manner in which the African thinks and acts in different situations in life, is governed by the principle of praxis.[10] The African's thought and action are shaped by natural phenomena which stir up wonder in his socio-cultural environment. He always has a practical understanding of and a creative response to life. The colonial assimilationist tactic was to make sure that the African could only act by imitation, not from personal reflection. The colonial elite, the administrators and educators, usurped the roles of the thinker and the innovator. All the thinking and all the changes were made for the colonized African.[11] Within this framework, the African mind was made a passive receptacle of their colonial masters' world view. The point that is being made here is best exemplified in what Paulo Freire has termed the "culture of silence."[12] He describes the oppressive and

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[9] Placide Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), p. 16.

[10] L.S. Senghor, "African-Negro Aesthetics" in Diogenes, No. 16, Winter, 1956, pp. 23-38.

[11] The modernization paradigm of development was prevalent in most of British and French West Africa. Emphasis was placed on the education of the elite, who were supposed to be the system innovators. See Arnold Toynbee (in D.C. Somervell, 1946). Also, Don Martindale, 1962.

[12] Paulo Freire, "Cultural Freedom in Latin America." In

degrading condition of existence which colonizers imposed on the colonized:

> In the culture of silence, the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore, prohibited from being.[13]

Thus deprived of intentionality and any reflective potential, the colonized African could neither re-create himself nor transform and give meaning to his reality. With decolonization and especially thanks to the emergence of 'Liberation Literature,' the majority of the peoples of Africa are regaining their "critical consciousness."[14] They are becoming more and more conscious of themselves as free and creative persons. And they want to reconstruct the traditional principle of praxis, a process of reflection and action, which once gave meaning and value to life before the Western intrusion.

The traditional African world view could be fittingly described in terms of P. Berger and T. Luckmann's phenomenological overview, which sees the social world as the product of man's consciousness.[15] One of the basic tenets

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Human Rights and the Liberation of Man. (ed.). (Indianna: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).

[13] Paulo Freire, Cultural Action. A Dialectical Analysis. In CIDOC Cuerderno, No. 4, 1970, pp. 4-8.

[14] Paulo Freire, Education and Critical Consciousness. (New York: Continuum Seabury Press, 1973).

[15] Peter Berger and T. Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality. (New York: The Penguin Press, 1967).

of African philosophy is the fact that it is man who in his here and now social situation creates meaning and purpose out of his actions. There is a growing realization that for the peoples of Africa to be intellectually liberated, they must be able to construe social reality out of their socio-historical setting. From this perspective, values of whatever type, are seen not as distinct entities, "subjected to universal laws but as cultural artifacts dependent upon specific meaning and intention of the people who value things and make value judgment."[16]

The African is less concerned with what will be; the emphasis is on what is. He concerns himself with the immediate problems of man and society. He acts to realize values and to attain goals which are immediately important to him. There is personal experience of phenomena and also social experience of phenomena. It is mostly out of the latter, that is, the shared experience that the tribesman derives the knowledge that helps him to re-create himself and his environment. That which is valuable from the traditional point of view is always the product of shared experience. In other words, value emanates from "the crucible of social living and social testing. That which is a value in effect, is that which works in the ongoing lives of men."[17] Within

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[16] T.B. Greenfield, "Organization as Social Inventions," in Journal of Applied Behavior Science, 1973, p. 204.

[17] Gail M. Inlow, Values in Transition: A Handbook. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1972), p. 4.

the traditional frame of reference, that which is valuable is perceived as a function of the human condition which the tribal community apprehend in a given situation. No values are considered as being absolute. That is to say, "what was good yesterday, and what is good today might not necessarily be good tomorrow."[18] There is always a constant awareness of the need for re-adjustments to meet the demands of the society.

Far from being an abstract exercise, the framework of this thesis attempts to outline some of the major value problems besetting the youths of Africa today. There is a decided preference for the natural and practical, as we try to combine the socio-cultural milieu of the African with his common sense everyday facts of life.

What is Man?

It is beginning to dawn on many Black African educators that one of the reasons African teenagers are experiencing some form of existential vacuum could be because many of them have been unduly exposed to some type of "reductionist concept of man."[19] As the traditional respect for the human person has continued to diminish, so has cynicism about the existential value of man increased. Many

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[18] Gail M. Inlow, Values in Transition: A Handbook. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1972), p. 4.

[19] Joseph Wilder, "Values and Psychotherapy" in American Journal of Psychotherapy, No. xxiii, 1969, p. 405.

philosophers are unanimous in affirming that the pattern and quality of life within any given society is an expression of a particular concept of man held by that society. A strong case, according to R.S. Peters, can therefore be made for saying that concepts of man are culture-bound and that they enshrine the valuations of those who propound them. R.S. Peters further states:

> Men are unique amongst animals in many ways, but perhaps one of its form is influenced enormously by the concept which they have of themselves. Their concept of man is one of the most important and far-reaching threads in the fabric of the public tradition into which they are initiated. . . . Built into these different traditions are different concepts of man - especially in respect of the differing categorization of the individual's relation to society and to the natural world. Such differences in the concept of man are crucial in determining the application of principles of conduct.[20]

In answer to the all-important question, "What is man?" African traditional philosophy tends heavily towards humanism. But it also accepts the fact that existence itself is shrouded in mystery. Hence the ground of man's being is humanism within a mystery. Man is not simply a mass of matter nor a pure spirit. He is both of them. Man finds meaning in life in his struggle to arrive at an equilibrium between the flesh and the spirit.[21] The following tenets summarize the traditional African concept of man:

(a) Man is a finite being endowed with a "vital

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[20] R.S. Peters, Ethics and Education. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 232.

[21] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 169-184.

force."[22]

(b) Man is a being of praxis, a creator and an evaluator.[23]

(c) Man is a socio-religious being.[24]

Man: A Being Endowed with "Vital Force"

The word being is used in African cosmology to represent the whole universe.[25] There are certain existential values ascribed to being, depending on the context in which it is used. At the center of the traditional universe is man, who is the custodian and caretaker of mother-nature. Although the African acknowledges that there is a supreme, infinite being,[26] yet it is not the supreme being but Nature who is the immediate principal of causation. Man, who is a lower being than Nature, must adapt to Nature. Henry Zentner made this point graphically with respect to the native peoples of North America and what Zentner has to say is equally true for

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[22] Placide Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).

[23] Nkwame Nkrumah, Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology of Decolonization and Development. (London: Heinemann Books, 1964).

[24] Benjamin C. Ray, African Religions. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1976).

[25] Daryll Forde (ed.), African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples. (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

[26] E.G. Parrinder, African Traditional Religion. (London: Hutchinson, 1954).

Africa.[27] He writes:

> Nature is herself regarded as the great creative force, the great transcendent causal principal, the inexhaustible source of order and genesis in both life and society. In her are constituted the rhythms which signal and recount the passage of time; on her broad breast, the earth, she provides to all living forms a place of succourance and support; and it is in her and through her and by her that her children find a cause, a reason to be born, a reason to live, and a reason to die. Life forms of every kind, therefore, symbolize nature's transcendence, her external recurrence, her encompassing wholeness, her inexhaustible power and mystery, and man's total and ultimate dependence upon her.[28]

Every human being is endowed with what Placide Temples has described as the "vital force" or "life essence."[29] It is this vital force which enables man to realize himself and to re-create his natural environment. The contingency of nature imposes on man the urge to create his essence, and to make those choices which will lead to his self-realization. It is the vital force which enables man to attain personal growth and self-fulfilment within the tribal community. Thus with the vital force as the directive force, man is supposed to be the author of his own destiny. He has to put a sense of value and meaning into his existence. Placide Temples has surmized that a wide range of human activities in the African

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[27] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science" in Knowledge and Control (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 255.

[28] Henry Zentner, "Traditional Notion of Time." (Calgary: Unpublished University of Calgary paper, 1976), pp. 11-12.

[29] Placide Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), p. 16.

way of life is motivated by the urge:

> to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly . . . to assure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity. . . . The greatest good one can do to another is to make it possible for him to possess in an increasing magnitude the vital force.[30]

What is clear from the foregoing is the philosophical awareness that the source of growth and of humaneness is not externally created but is essentially within the human person. Man has within himself the ability to plan intelligently, to deliberate and to make free conscious choices. In the traditional society, any person who is deemed by the elders to be living a life that is not constituted of meaning and values is often referred to as a "doll" or a "non-being."[31]

Man: A Being of Praxis:

The traditional cosmological postulate is hierarchical. At the top of the ladder is God, the immortal creator of the entire universe; followed by Nature. Next in order are the lesser gods and ancestors who are immortal but subordinate to God. Next is man, who is mortal and rational; followed by the brute animal, mortal but irrational. And at the base is plant life, which is mortal, irrational and immobile. In all of the universe, apart from God and the lesser gods (ancestors), only man is rational. An essential corollary of

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[30] Placide Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), p. 16.

[31] E.G. Parrinder, West African Religion. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 18.

man's rationality is the freedom to pick and choose what he says and does. As Lawrence A. Pervin puts it:

> This freedom is highly valued, for it is part of that which distinguishes man from other animals and makes him a human being. Part of this is also the ability of man to see himself as a self, to have consciousness, to be reflexive, to question his own existence. These are powers and possibilities of man and man alone.[32]

The traditional African concept of man directly conflicts with the notion of man as a "naked ape" or man as "nothing but a complex biochemical mechanism powered by a combustion system which energizes computers with prodigious storage facilities for retaining encoded information."[33] From the traditional perspective, man is neither an ape nor a robot. Man is not simply an animal but a thinking and free morally responsible agent. The vital force makes it possible for man to consciously interpret his socio-historical milieu and to give it meaning. Man as a being of praxis is a planner; he tries to understand, to evaluate and to integrate himself. He tries to control his environment, to master the ups and downs of life, so he can attain self-realization. It has been pointed out by Placide Temples that in Africa, there is the common belief that man is responsible for his own self-improvement, for his progress and conduct and for the survival

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[32] Lawrence A. Pervin, "Human Freedom" in Psychologist. (May 15, 1960), p. 23.

[33] Joseph Wilder, "Values and Psychotherapy" in American Journal of Psychotherapy, No. xxiii, 1969, p. 405.

of his tribal community.[34] Man is not therefore simply a passive receptacle, but through the activation of his vital force, he becomes a conscious transformer of himself and his social world. This is basically what is meant by the traditional concept of man as a being of praxis.

The traditional philosopher sees man as different from a brute animal because man is a conscious, free and creative being. It is these three attributes, but most especially, his creative thinking and his creative behavior, which makes man a being of praxis and different from every other being. J. Petrovic stresses this distinctive and unique reflective characteristic of man when he writes:

> Man as praxis does not cease to be a biological being any more than the animal as biological being is exempted from physical and chemical laws. But although man has his particular biological nature, this nature is not that by which he essentially differs from everything else that exists.[35]

Man as praxis is not only a creator but he is also an evaluator. There are always values embedded in all of his purposive behavior. This is so because he lives in a world that is constituted by values. In the words of T. Grunberg: "In the human realm, values belong to the order of existence itself. They are inherent in all human actions which they

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[34] Placid Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).

[35] G. Petrovic, "Man as Economic Animal and Man as Praxis" in Inquiry, Vol. 6, 1963, p. 53.

substantiate and orient."[36] The traditional concept of man definitely implies the problems of axiology. Because man is considered a being of praxis, the axiological dimensions of his thought and action always preoccupied the traditional philosopher.

Man: A Socio-Religious Being

Of particular importance in the traditional estimation of man is the awareness that man is a being of relationships; a being who creates a world of intersubjectivity. The African maintains a vertical man-to-God relationship and a horizontal man-to-man relationship. Swailem Sidhom crystallizes this concept of intersubjectvity in the following statement:

> Existence in-relations sums up the pattern of the African way of life. And this encompasses within it a great deal, practically the whole universe. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family and himself. Into each avenue he enters with his whole being, without essentially distinguishing the existence of any boundaries dividing one from the other.[37]

The corporate nature of African societies is characterized by a web of closely knit kinship, social and religious relationships. There is a traditional solidarity on account of which the individual could say: "I am because we

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[36] T. Grunberg, "Value-Revolution and Axiology: in Inquiry, Vol. 2, 1969, p. 102.

[37] Swailem Sidom, "The Estimate of Man" in Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs. (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 102.

are, and since we are, therefore I am."[38] In a sense, it could be rightly said that a comparatively large fraction of the African's life is a matter of public concern; or to use Ralph Perry's expression that "the individual lives under the watchful and censorious scrutiny of his fellows."[39] Also, it is true to some extent, as J. Mullin has observed, that "the African submits his thoughts to the group for judgment."[40] But it is, however, wrong to assume that little or no scope is allowed "to personal liberty and to that which is unique and private in the individual."[41] Here, there is a difference between what constitutes "personal liberty" for the African and what constitutes the same for the Western man. Because the African believes that a man who is isolated from the tribal world of intersubjectivity is unable to develop any of his human potentials, conformity is vital to the well-being of both the individual person and the community as a whole. What is good for the community is often considered good also for the individuals who live in it. In other words, the collective will which imposes the ought-to-be, is identifiable in the custom, culture and religion of the community. Although

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[38] John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 224.

[39] Ralph Perry, General Theory of Value. (New York: Longmans Green, 1926), p. 407.

[40] Joseph Mullin, The Catholic Church in Modern Africa. (London: Chapman, 1958), p. 31.

[41] Ralph Perry, Op. Cit., p. 407.

very often the personal will is subsumed under the collective will, yet it is never taken away. According to Emile Durkheim, the collective will expresses itself in the:

> collective representations or in that higher social subject which possesses a moral reality richer and more complex than the individual subject, so that it evokes the individual's disinterested conformity. . . . The collective will is authoritative over any given individual by virtue of constituting a will of a higher order, or by virtue of the fact that it incorporates and satisfies that individual.[42]

The act of knowing and evaluating is thus the expression of the collective interest of the tribal community. It is the collective will that makes anything good or bad. In short, value consists in whatsoever has been judged to be valuable by the collective will of the community.

The final observation about the traditional concept of man is that in Africa man has always been considered religious. Until colonization introduced a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, everything in the traditional African's life tended towards his search for self-transcendence.[43] This search for perfection and self-transcendence belonged not in the realm of logical or scientific knowledge but could only be found either in intuition or religious faith. Thus religion was often considered as the means par excellence for attaining

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[42] Emile Durkheim, quoted in Ralph Perry, General Theory of Value. (New York: Longmans Green, 1926), p. 407.

[43] S. Ottenberg and Phoebe, Cultures and Societies in

self-realization. As E.G. Parrinder has aptly stated, "religion is the single most important influence in the life of most Africans."[44] Religion pierces through and through the traditional concept of man. Henry Maurier has masterfully espoused the religious dimension of the traditional concept of man in the rather long extract that follows:

> If the African thinks of a creator and provident God, he does not do so gratuitously, but always in reference to his human condition. Man's task is to understand this human condition, to endow it with solidarity, to explain, master and direct it. . . . Man, because he is man, cannot fail thus to experience his human condition; he does not simply live it, it is a problem and causes anxiety. He tries to dominate and master it, to comprehend it; he wants to give meaning and direction; he grasps it either in its details or as a whole, he tries to attach it to some other reality, to make himself a model of it; he asks himself why and how he is this way. These questions are first perceived vaguely and globally, without distance and objectivation; they are lived and resolved through images symbolically, under the impulse of the unconscious and its archetypes. Then they are reflected on, reasoned, codified and rationally expounded. . . . Man expresses this experience and at the same time lives it under different forms, though these are often tied to one another; religious experience, art, social organization and so on.[45]

A very important function of traditional religion is that of integrating the total value system of the society. Religion provides the African with a set of values on which depend the survival of the community. It consolidates old

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Africa. (New York: Orbis Books, 1971). Also see, Max Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955).

[44] E.G. Parrinder, West African Religion. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 187.

[45] Henri Maurier, The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), p. 38.

values and creates new ones through daily ritual symbols and practises. It must be noted that the type of religion that is being discussed here has no creeds, no dogma, or in fact, any unanimous set of beliefs. The reason this type of religion is able to dictate every detail of the traditional man's life and conduct is because, in John Mbiti's words: "Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes traditional Africa so religious; religion is in their whole system of being."[46]

It has to be said that the traditional African concept of man as it has been analyzed in the preceeding pages is in danger of completely vaporizing in the face of rapid industrialization and alien ideologies. A blanket return to the past is not here being advocated. However, there is need to reconstruct the traditional concept of man so that it can provide the basis for the new concept of man in the present and the future.

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[46] John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 3.

Chapter 3

THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTS OF TIME, CAUSALITY AND EVIL

Time as a Measure of Value

The way in which time is experienced reflects the world-view and value system of a society. Time is a category which is valuational in its social expression. In every society, according to Fred Davis, certain activities are required to complete various tasks and to achieve various goals. These activities form a sequence, they may be of short duration or long duration.[1] Each society has values which are functionally associated with time; and such values are usually linked with the socio-historical structure of the society.

It has often been suggested by some political economists that the difference in the valuation of time between Black Africa and the Western world is largely responsible for the underdevelopment of the African continent. It is pointed out that whereas the Western man places great value on time, is very prone to calculate precisely the alternative uses of time, is future oriented and so on, the traditional African treats time in exactly the

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[1] Fred Davis, Philosophy for a New Generation. (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1970).

opposite way. While this assertion seems to be partially true, it is however naive to try to explain the intricate question of underdevelopment in terms of differences in the experience of time.

In African traditional philosophy, time as such, has no value. Time itself does not exist in the universe, but rather, time is produced by the events which occur in time.[2] The people of Africa, south of the Sahara, knew nothing of mathematical time or clock time until the advent of the European colonizers. But they did have the concept of physical time, that is, time as based on the cyclical rhythm of nature. In this wise, time is regarded as having an endless, ever-recurring circular nature.[3]

Perhaps the traditional experience of time duration is best described in the words of Robert Ornstein as being:

> keyed to remembrance of things past - to retrospection. So the experience of time is divided along the lines of memory - the present as short-term storage and the past duration as long-term storage.[4]

There is a complete lack of future orientation in the traditional African concept of time. Because of the absence

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[2] G.J. Ojo, Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis. (London: University of London Press, 1966), pp. 201-207.

[3] Daniel McCall, Africa in Time-Perspective. (Boston: Boston University Press, 1964), pp. 120-130. Also see P. Bohanna, "Concepts of Time Among the Tiv of Nigeria." In Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 9, (1962), p. 251 ff.

[4] Robert Ornstein, The Experience of Time. (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 20.

of any idealized concept of temporal future, the African is prone to invest with value only the here and now tasks and experiences. Most of his valued goals and actions acquire their meaning, not because of some imagined future gratification, but on the ground that these goals or actions satisfy an immediate need. The traditional African experience of time is a radical shift from what will be, to what is; the emphasis is on the present fulfilment of desired goals.

According to John Mbiti, the African can only evaluate past and present events, the future has no value. He writes:

> The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinate future, is practically foreign to African thinking. . . . Time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of 'no-time.' Hence time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. . . . The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time.[5]

Time itself has to be experienced in order for it to be valued. Thus there is positive evaluation of the past and of the present, but no value can be placed on a future act or event. Only what has been experienced in the past and what

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[5] Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane. Trans. by Willard R. Trask. (New York: Harper and Row, 1961). Also see H.A. Innis, Changing Concepts of Time. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952).

is being experienced now, constitute the field of valuation. The future does not exist, values cannot be, therefore, set up to guide future human conduct.

Without doubt, the traditional concept of time has far reaching implications for value-education in Black Africa today. However, these implications cannot be discussed in this present study.

Value and Causality

The traditional African principle of causation has two distinctive characteristics. In the first place, causality is regulated by events, not by law. And secondly, nature is accorded great pre-eminence as the principle of causality.[6] Because it is events which control causality, it is not possible to predict the future from the present or infer the past from the present. Causality is explicable in terms of explaining what happens now by what happened in the past. In other words, causation proceeds from the past towards the present; and there is no future. The African looks for meaning rather than symbol; a cause is considered as being an antecedent that exerts force on something that follows passively after. Thus if for example, a villager's wife gives birth to a deformed child or a baby who is very sickly, the cause could be traced back to some act of inchastity on the part of its mother, even as far back as

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[6] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 17.

before her marriage.[7]

The second feature of traditional causation is the paramount role of nature as principle of causality. All that is on the face of the earth and below is under the powerful influence of nature. All events and all human behavior are explicable in terms of man's obedience and submission to the forces of nature. In fact, causation is a personified manifestation of nature herself. The African views the universe as the arena wherein many spiritual forces are operating; most of these forces are expressed in a variety of religious forms. This is the reason traditional tribal gods are natural, personal and ubiquitous. As Edwin Smith has observed: "Many of these gods are associated with the phenomena of nature - the sky and sun, rain and thunder, 'old mother earth'; and the face of the mother."[8] In traditional religion God is considered as inaccessible and very remote. Hence nature, as it were, takes the place of God as far as causation is concerned. So it is that the spiritual forces in nature remain the focal potency of causation. These forces inherent in nature simultaneously inspire fear and love; they are objects of fascination and can often be moved in answer to human supplications and manipulations. The

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[7] Robin Horton, "Destiny and the Unconscious in West Africa." In Africa. April, 1961.

[8] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: Yoruba God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 156.

local prophets and priestess, the soothsayers and the native doctors are the chief diagnoticians of the spiritual forces of nature. In the words of Ulli Beier: "If men learn to catch them, the powers of the gods will pass into certain of their faithful and help them to consolidate the community."[9]

Perhaps it was because causation was interpreted by events instead of by law, that traditional values remained stable, as each generation transmitted more or less the same ideas and ideals to the next.

Value and the Problem of Evil

All human society is basically engrossed with the problem of evil. Efforts are made to explain evil and to prescribe some moral sanctions which will ensure mutual co-existence in and salvation for the society. The traditional African never imputes evil to the devil, neither is evil imputed to God or the ancestors; man is always the cause of evil. Man is regarded as the sole author and creator of evil; man is personally responsible for bringing about evil in the world. As John Mbiti very aptly explains, within the tightly knit corporate African communities, "almost every form of evil that a person suffers, whether it is moral or natural evil, is believed to be caused by members of his community."[10]

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[9] Edwin Smith, in West African Religion. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), Forward, p. xi.

[10] Ulli Beier, Ancient Religions. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 60.

The African awareness of evil in the community and in the world is rooted in the ontology of the "vital force." In the words of Adeolu Adegbola:

> The cause of evil will be seen as lying at the centre of human personality, springing out of man's urge for vital force, consisting of the inner motives animating the search for life-force and the extent to which one is able to universalize this desire for life-force.[11]

Evil is considered a personal act; it is acting contrary to one's being; it is identifying with forces that militate against personal well being; it is also a violation of other's rights and finally a threat to the welfare of the entire tribal community. From the traditional point of view, evil is fundamentally an inward problem of character; evil does not exist in the abstract. In other words, traditional philosophy rejects the proposition that any kind of act can be evil in and of itself.[12] The African sees means and end as both corporeal and intersubjective; for it is intersubjectivity which points a man out in his human uniqueness and as a being of praxis. In answer to the question of the possibility of there being a good or evil act in the abstract, traditional philosophy expresses a viewpoint similar to that of William Vandermack, who states:

> Any concrete act itself is either good or bad, valuable or non-valuable, if it is a genuine human act and to the extent that it is a genuine human act. For this reason,

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[11] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 204.

[12] Adeolu Adegbola, "Theological Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs. (ed.) (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 133.

> the question of freedom and the question of intersubjectivity are of essential importance. As a matter of fact, good and evil refer to the success or failure of intersubjectivity and for this reason there cannot be any question of good or evil unless there is first a question of intersubjectivity; furthermore, we can speak of good and evil only to the extent that we speak of intersubjectivity.[13]

Two factors make the emphasis on intersubjectivity very important. The first is the closely knit African tribal structure, and the second is the fact that most traditional values and moral obligations are rooted in social bonds. Intersubjectivity thus becomes a form of community fulfilled or a form of community unfulfilled. An evil act is associated with a non-fulfillment of community; it is a personal failure in intersubjectivity.

The Notions of Sin and Taboo

Most native African words which are translated into English as "sin" have the literal meaning of "that which happens," and carry a meaning which is quite different from the Judeo-Christian concept of sin. In Africa sin is only very remotely considered "an offense against God." The Yoruba word for sin, "ese" describes not the nature of the act but the quality of its sequel. It designates sin as that which upsets the equilibrium of both personal and societal relationship. To sin is to stray from the path of practical wisdom; it is to do that which is "rotten" and valueless or

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[13] William Vandermack, Towards a Christian Ethic. (New York: Newman Press, 1966), p. 50.

to do that which is deadly (physical death) and perverse. The nature of sin is determined by the outward results it produces, either in the individual perpetrating the sinful act or in the tribal community at large. For this reason, anything or any act that produces evil as its consequence is considered as sinful and valueless.[14]

The African concept of sin and that of taboo are in no way synonymous or identical. While it may be correct to assert that the "morality of the people of West Africa is largely indicated by the taboos with which their lives are surrounded,"[15] it is wrong either to identify the African value system with the mechanism of the taboos, or to regard taboos as the main embodiment of African morality.

The word for taboo in many African languages could be translated into the English as "that which must not be done," and it denotes the negative idea of a "thou shalt not." The notion of taboo bears relationship to that which is customarily not done or that which no one ever does. A taboo prohibits indiscriminately. And these prohibitions are very often amoral. The first important distinction between sin and taboo is that whereas the traditional notion of sin always implies intentionality, that of taboo does not. In the words of J. Goetz: "the taboo implies an immediate,

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[14] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 205.

[15] E.G. Parrinder, West African Religion. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp. 199-205.

automatic retribution in the form of sickness or death, which is absolutely foreign to the notions of responsibility and intentionality."[16] For example, to eat a forbidden animal or do something which is a taboo, even if the eating or the action was done inadvertently, demands immediate expiation. The internal impurity said to be incurred through the violation of a taboo is usually removed by the performance of certain prescribed rituals. The second major distinction between sin and taboo is that unlike the taboo, the notion of sin is geared towards the total and genuine growth of the individual. By this is meant that by arousing the sinner to an awareness and sensitivity of his evil act, he is persuaded to reform his life. To sin is to cut oneself off from the love and affection of the community, hence the sinner craves extroverted love which impels him to social action and makes him seek re-integration into his tribal community. The person who sins and repents of it is co-creating self-value with the other members of his community. The person who disobeys a taboo does not thereby cease to achieve personal growth; taboos are mostly amoral. Obedience to the command of a taboo is motivated by dread of punishment or the privation of some basic needs. The primary reason many people obey taboos is simply to keep their hides, to ensure their personal security.

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[16] J. Goetz, Reader in Comparative Religion. (New York: Harper and Row, 2nd Ed., 1965).

The traditional concept of sin has to do with moral conscience, with responsibility and accountability; it is value-oriented. In the act of sinning, the sinner perceives the value or disvalue of an action before he responds to it. Hence, whenever values are transgressed the experience of guilt is often proportionate to the importance of the value in question. It is very important to understand the distinction between the notion of sin and that of taboo, because a value system based on taboos is very far from a morality in which the conscience is disturbed by the nature of values inherent in human actions.

It is totally inadequate to study the African system of value only within the confines of the taboo, as many have done in the past. In order to fully investigate the traditional value system, account has to be taken of the concepts of sin and taboo separately, the distinction between them must be understood and the African meaning given to the term "sin" must also be understood.

Chapter 4

VALUE IN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Towards a Definition of Value

What is being attempted here is mainly an interpretive analysis, and it is meant to be a description which enables us to analyze the social, religious and cultural ramifications of value within the West African context. Our focus is both on the theoretical act of evaluation as well as on what the African regards as being of value. An attempt is being made to see values as arising out of the creative inputs to experience within the African's cultural and historical boundaries. In other words, the underlying assumption of this thesis is that the concept of value has to do with a continuing process in the history of African thought, and that as such, value is conditioned and shaped by local socio-political structures and prevailing ideologies.

There is an evaluative element in the internal operations of the four basic communal institutions that make up the fabric of the African life.[1] A study of these institutions and the way in which they operate demonstrates the existence of traditional norms of value. These foursome

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[1] See Chapter 1.

establish norms of value and specify the ways in which these norms evaluate acts, institute choices and impose sanctions. What is of value must pass the critical criteria of the family, the tribal community, the educational system and the religious standard. In this sense, values could be broadly described as those critical and persistent criteria which either designate certain objects as ideals, as worthy of respect, or which guide human purposive behavior.

The traditional act of evaluation is based on three principles, namely, (a) the principle of self-realization, (b) the principle of adjustment to environment, and (c) the principle of what is required to solve a problematic situation.

(a) The urge for self-realization persists in traditional ethics, aesthetics, religion and in fact, it permeates the entire African life.[2] From the traditional point of view, only those things have value which lead to the attainment of the vital force. When in traditional philosophy something is said to be valuable, it does not necessarily mean that that something is good, per se, or that it possesses of itself the quality of goodness. For example, the ritual murder of a tribal maiden to appease the goddess of the earth, is considered valuable, but this does not mean that to murder is a good act. The traditional interpretation of that which

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[2] Placide Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).

is of value comes close to the contextualist school of thought, as expressed by Charles Dennis Marler in the following statement:

> The genesis of values is to be found in human desires rather than the presence of a quality existing a priori in acts, ideas, objects and processes independent of the subject. . . . We decide whether a desire is "desirable," that is, worthy of being desired (or a value-candidate, is "valuable," that is, worthy of being valued) only by tracing out the relationships between the desire in question and other variables within a given context of time, place and people. Not every desire is desirable - only those which we judge so in terms of their demonstrated contextual relationships.[3]

From the traditional position, the value of an object lies in its relationship to the interests of the family, the tribe, the religious and educational systems. The reason for example it is considered valuable among members of the same tribal community to be truthful to one another, is because being truthful is necessary for the preservation of the tribal solidarity. In this instance, truthfulness is considered as being essential to the well-being of each member of the community, and so value is put on the act of truth-telling for as long as it serves the purpose of tribal solidarity. There is no question of making truth-telling in the abstract, a virtuous act. Values spring from societal norms and are then conferred on acts or objects. In other words, an action or an object is valuable only relative to the usefulness to, or desirability of, the society. An object can neither be

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[3] Charles Dennis Marler, Philosophy and Schooling. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1975), p. 187.

valuable for its own sake nor be so only relative to the person (an individual) who values it. Since the determination of what is valuable is a communal affair, the individual can only achieve self-realization through conformity to the societal norms of value.[4]

(b) There is emphasis on living in harmony with nature, as the African tries to effect integration of disposition in relation to his spiritual and physical environment. The traditional man is very much dependent on nature,[5] as such, anything that has to do with life, food and shelter, all things being equal, is generally considered valuable. Whereas in the Western world, the basic necessities of life, food, shelter and security can now be taken for granted, the situation in most of Black Africa is not quite the same. The basic necessities in addition to the land, the river, the wild-life, these and many more, are valuable in the sense that these gifts of nature ought to be revered, preserved and used in the best possible way.

It has to be noted that in the African philosophical thought, nothing in nature has value in and of itself; things have value because society places value on them. Thus a barren land has no value, a river whose water cannot be used for anything is valueless. Nothing of itself possesses either

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[4] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 200.

[5] See Chapter 2.

a positive or a negative value, it is man who endows everything, including himself, with value. When the African puts a value on anything that touches on his natural environment, the value is always in respect of what the community can gain (or does gain) from what is being evaluated. This process of evaluating things is also applicable to individuals within the community. Thus the African man values his wife because she can produce children for him; he values his children because they are extensions of himself; he values his tribal community because he believes he can find self-fulfilment only through and with his fellow tribesmen.

(c) Whatever is useful in solving a problematic situation becomes something of value, at least for the occasion. In this sense, the African does not categorize values into a set of good acts and bad acts. Such acts as kindness, fidelity, honesty, truthfulness and so on, are not considered as good everywhere and any time. It often depends on who does what, and how and when it is done. As John Mbiti has observed, "kindness is not a virtue if someone has not been kind to a fellow tribesman."[6] By the same token, honesty is not the best policy if it hurts a member of the family. A virtue must be desirable for it to be considered a value. Within the traditional setting, the problem of axiology does not simply reduce to a permanent categorization

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[6] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 210.

of certain acts, like honesty, kindness, pleasure, as good; and others like dishonesty, falsehood, pain, as bad acts. What is good or bad is determined by situation and circumstances and by the specific need (desire) of the community. What is of value today might be of no value tomorrow. What was of great value in the past may suddenly cease to be of any value today because of changed ideology or social situation. This perspective is very similar to John Dewey's when he writes:

> The value of different ends that suggests themselves is estimated or measured by the capacity they exhibit to guide action in making good, satisfying, in its literal sense, existing lacks. Here is the factor that cuts short the process of foreseeing and weighing end-in-view in their function as means. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof and sufficient also is the good of that which does away with the existing evil. Sufficient because it is the means of instituting a complete situation or an integrated set of conditions.[7]

The traditional value system is not content-oriented but habit-oriented. It is very often not what is done but why and how it is done that constitutes a good act or a bad act. In the words of John Mbiti:

> African morality is a morality of conduct rather than a morality of being. This is what one might call "dynamic ethics" rather than "static ethics," for it defines what a person does rather than what he is. Conversely, a person is what he is because of what he does, rather than he does what he does because of what he is.[8]

The African considers values as belonging to the realm

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[7] John Dewey, Theory of Valuation. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 46.

[8] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 214.

of human existence. Nothing in his world is value free, as value is thought to be inherent in all purposive behavior. But at the same time, as has repeatedly been stressed all along, value is not regarded as an inherent attribute or character of any object; a value does not exist in the abstract. All values are of a wholly subjective nature and are bound to each and every human action.[9]

To summarize, the traditional concept of value could be described as a system which is characteristic of a people who emphasize self-realization, conformity, communality and present-time orientation, and whose conduct and judgments are dominated by the principle of moral relativism.

Common Sense Approach to Axiology

The hallmark of the African's quest for order and regularity in his daily problems of axiology is common sense. Although traditional thought does not totally lack the process of theoretical abstraction, yet the level of abstraction is very low.[10] Hence the duty of putting things in a causal context is primarily the job of the common sense. In this regard, A Schutz makes a very pertinent remark. He writes:

> The social world has a particular meaning and relevant

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[9] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." In Knowledge and Control, (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 200.

[10] Robin Horton, Ibid.

> structure for the human beings living, thinking and acting therein. They have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world by a series of common sense constructs which determine their behavior, define the goal of their actions, the means available for them - in brief, which help them find their bearing in their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it.[11]

The traditional inductive way of thinking greatly facilitates the exercise of the common sense. Personal idioms are usually adopted as the basis of understanding the universe; and as would be expected, the common sense approach looks for antecedents of any happenings among events adjacent in space and time, while abhoring action at a distance or far into the future.[12] The common sense approach is supposed to be the antithesis of the scientific method. According to George Beadle the following procedure constitutes the scientific method:

> . . . recognition of the problem, choosing the right experimental material, making the proper observations, careful analysis, formulation of a reasonable hypothesis, thorough testing of that hypothesis, generalizing from the verified hypothesis, making proper deductions, and presenting the results and interpretation in a report that is a model of directness, clarity and thoroughness.[13]

In contrast to the above procedure, the common sense construct is based on concrete, familiar everyday events rather than on an abstract model of theorizing. The African finds common sense knowledge handier for coping with a wide range of

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[11] A. Schutz, Collected Papers. (The Hague: 1973), Vol. 1, p. 6.

[12] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." In Knowledge and Control, (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 211.

[13] George Beadle, An Introduction to Science. (Atlanta: Tupper and Love Inc., 1965), p. 6.

circumstances in his everyday life. There is inherent in a common sense approach, the role of the social situation as a norm of valuation. In other words, every human situation is considered to practically generate its own concrete, specific norm and the relevant sanction.

Robin Horton has critically outlined the categories often used to conceptualize the difference between the scientific methodology and the traditional common sense paradigm.[14] Some of the positive and negative aspects are:

Western Scientific Method		Traditional Common Sense
Intellectual	versus	Emotional
Rational	versus	Mystical
Reality-oriented	versus	Fantasy-oriented
Causally-oriented	versus	Supernaturally-oriented
Empirical	versus	Non-empirical
Abstract	versus	Concrete
Analytical	versus	Non-analytical

Instead of looking at the common sense approach in a negative way, the time has come to critically examine how and why this approach has persisted through many generations. When confronted with the many vicissitudes of human thought and action, common sense has always enabled the African to grasp and comprehend the situation. To adapt the words of Ernest Cole, there must have been some good in traditional common sense for it to have lasted as long as it did.[15]

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[14] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." In Knowledge and Control, (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 228. Also see Nikunja V. Banerjee, Concerning Human Understanding: Essays on the Common Sense Background of Philosophy. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp. 190-214; pp. 248 ff.

[15] Ernest Cole, House of Bondage. (New York: Orbis

Today there is a great need to rediscover the significance of common sense in the traditional African system of evaluation. Robin Horton realizes this necessity and makes his point in the following statement:

> I want to point out that it is not only where scientific method is in use that we find theories which both aim at grasping causal connections and to some extent succeed in this aim. . . . Given the basic process of theory-making and an environmental stability which gives theory plenty of time to adjust to experience, a people's belief system may come, even in the absence of scientific method, to grasp at least some significant causal connections.[16]

Common sense does provide the African with a set of values and techniques which enables him to identify axiological problems and seek appropriate solutions. Any new approach to African axiology must complement rather than reject the traditional common sense world-view.

An "Open" Versus a "Closed" Value System

Perhaps the most devastating criticism that is directed against the traditional system of value is the fact that it operates within a closed system; there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established corpus of what the community regards as being of value. Robin Horton has candidly observed that the "African value system is closed, that is, it is characterized by lack of awareness of

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Books, 1967), p. 150.

[16] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." In Knowledge and Control, (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 217.

alternatives, sacredness of beliefs and anxiety about threats to them."[17] Also, Evans-Pritchard gives the example of several African communities where, "they reason excellently in the idiom of their beliefs but they cannot reason outside or against their beliefs because they have no other idiom in which to express their thoughts."[18] This absence of an awareness of alternatives makes the acceptance of the "traditional" way of doing things absolute and removes any possibility of questioning the status quo.

The African youth who is exposed to Western education and ways of thinking, is often frustrated when no logical explanation is forthcoming from the village elders or king, for the imposition of certain sanctions or for making certain value judgments. Because the traditional moralist is often not able to explain most axiological problems in terms of defensible theory, there is a propensity towards dogmatism. In other words, there is an insistence upon a belief in excess of the degree to which available evidence can support it. This moral dogmatism appears in a variety of ways. It could be in the form of an appeal to the supernatural or so-called "time-honored tradition;" it could be an appeal to the practical experience of the elders or the king. Its

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[17] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." In Knowledge and Control, (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 231.

[18] E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande. (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 338.

shortcomings apart, dogmatism has helped to introduce simplicity into complexity, order into disorder, and in general has helped to regulate the life and conduct of the village communities.

But today there is need for a transition from the dogmatic and closed predicament to an open system of valuation. What I believe is crucial to the success of this transition is the development of "critical consciousness."[19] Under the traditional conditions, where everyone shares the same personal idioms, the same basic religious beliefs and the same institutionalized value tenets, there is hardly room for innovations and criticisms.

The Relation Between Knowledge and Value

The instruments of traditional knowledge are mainly intuition and authority.[20] These two also form the basis of value judgments. For the African, knowledge is never simply the possession of ideas, but to know means to judge; it means to connect ideas with some real object and to say it is true or false, good or bad. In traditional epistemology, knowledge is always regarded as a form of valuing. The African man who tells his child, "don't steal from a fellow tribesman" is not simply making an emotive statement. On the other hand, he is

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[19] Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness. (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

[20] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 214.

making a declarative statement which expresses the value judgment of disapproval. There is such an intimate bond between ideas and reality that the African cannot conceivably disassociate ideas from reality. Ideas are always bound to events and occasions.[21] And values are so tied to reality that the African cannot contemplate in his mind any idea of value which is disassociated from an occasion.

A point that needs mentioning is the fact that traditional philosophy admits of no form of dualism. The African sees life as a unity; the world is one and it exists within the mind. There is no distinction between mind and matter. In the words of Robin Horton:

> what the moderns would call 'mental activities' and material things' are both part of a single reality, neither material nor immaterial. Thinking, conceiving, saying, and so on, are described in terms of organs like heart and brain, and actions like the uttering of words.[22]

Because life is a unity, there is no discontinuity between means and end; within the traditional framework, every end is regarded as a means in an endless continuum. So the question as to whether the "end justifies the means" does not arise. Many Westerners have misunderstood the way in which the Africans behave because they bring into the African situation their dualism and distinction between means and end, categories which do not exist in the African thought pattern.

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[21] Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." In Knowledge and Control, (ed.). (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 231.

[22] Robin Horton, Ibid., p. 235.

As has been briefly observed earlier in this chapter, the African does not have a concept of pure knowledge. To adapt the words of T. Grunberg: "Any knowledge, description or classification presupposes an evaluation according to some criteria, a scale of values and is implicitly an axiological act."[23] In the traditional sense, knowledge is not simply the amassing of factual information but it implies the capability to transform such information into a variety of ways of living and acting. Knowledge involves the principle of praxis; to know is to be able to make concrete and practical value judgment on the basis of some information. In this sense, knowledge becomes the basis of conduct, since the attainment of self-realization depends on the type of value decisions that govern a person's life. Perhaps the Aristotelian concept of "practical wisdom,"[24] best describes the African understanding of knowledge. Viewed this way, knowledge becomes "a precondition for good and noble conduct. Practical thought engages the intellect in acting, feeling and choosing."[25] According to William Frankena, practical wisdom, as far as it concerns values, is "a rational disposition that grasps the truth about actions in relation

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[23] T. Grunberg, "Value-Revolution and Axiology." In Inquiry, Vol. 2, 1969, p. 102.

[24] Aristotle, Ethics. Edited and Translated by John Warrington. (New York: Dent and Sons, 1963), pp. 123-125.

[25] William Frankena, Three Historical Philosophies of Education. (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1965), p. 35.

to what is good or bad for human beings."[26]

From the African viewpoint, every action of the individual member of the community is supposed to be guided by a consideration of what is good for the survival of the tribal community at large. In many communities, a man is not considered as possessing knowledge if he lacks practical wisdom.[27] Such a man cannot perform valuable acts or do valuable things; neither can such a man attain self-realization. In fact, he is not a person but a doll.

Value and the Philosophy of Negritude

There has been a tendency to regard African history as the story of European adventures in Africa.[28] This distorted viewpoint cuts Africa off from centuries of her glorious past. There were centuries of African history before the Islamic and Euro-Christian cultures invaded and destroyed African divilization.[29] Recent research studies attest to the fact that Africa did have in the past a flourishing academic centre in Timbuktu, at a time when most

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[26] William Frankena, Three Historical Philosophies of Education. (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1965), p. 36.

[27] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 155.

[28] Basil Davidson, Africa in History: Themes and Outlines. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968. Also see J.O. Collins, Problems in African History. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

[29] Chancellor Williams, The Destruction of Black Civilization. (Chicago: Third World Press, 1974).

of Europe was still illiterate.[30]

However, after centuries of struggle with alien civilizations, Africa is beginning to re-discover herself. A new history of Africa is being written which mirrors her socio-cultural and philosophical milieu, while regarding the Islamic and European incursions as footnotes in this history.[31] The emergent nations of Black Africa are beginning to be self-assertive and to forge viable philosophical systems through the enunciation of their Africanness. In his translator's note to Risieri Frondizi's, 'What is Value,' Solomon Lipp makes the following very pertinent observation:

> This is a period in which technological advance has aggravated beyond measure and calculation the consequences of culture crisis and ideological clash. The rise of new nations, the self-assertiveness of hitherto "suppressed" peoples, the never-ending challenges to the status quo, and the resultant re-evaluation and re-adjustment required to meet them, all bring into sharp focus the underlying premises upon which individual and group behavior patterns as well as entire governmental systems are based. The re-examination of some of these assumptions by troubled consciences leads inevitably to the problem of what sort of values we live by. Thus, the battle of ideologies is essentially related to conflict between value systems.[32]

The emergence of the philosophy of negritude is a

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[30] General O. Obasanjo, "Opening Address to the Colloquim of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture." In News from Nigeria. (Ottawa: High Commission Office, February 14, 1977), p. 12.

[31] Nkwame Nkrumah, I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology. (London: Heinemann, 1961).

[32] Solomon Lipp, in What is Value: Introduction to Axiology. (Lassale: Open Court, 1963), p. xi.

manifestation of the ideological renaissance described above by Solomon Lipp. More and more educated Africans are realizing that Western ideologies and values have alienated them from their traditional roots without giving them a satisfactory substitute.[33] As a result there is a great search for identity going on in Africa today; and the philosophy of negritude has emerged as part of this search.

First coined by Aime Cesaire of the West Indies, negritude is the concept that seeks to give the Blackman self-identity and to give impetus to his struggle to see intrinsic merit in the traditional philosophy of life.[34] Like most new concepts, negritude has had a hard time arousing the consciousness of suppressed Blacks throughout the world. Special tribute ought to be paid to Edward W. Blyden, a freed slave who settled in Liberia, who in that face of massive opposition from the powers-that-be,[35] very courageously spoke out in favor of giving:

> the African a sense of worth and self-respect, a pride in himself, in his race, in his way of life, and in the role he had played and would play in the history of world civilization."[36]

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[33] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 227.

[34] The concept of negritude is mentioned only in passing by most writers; perhaps only in the writings of Edward Blyden and Leopold Senghor is the concept best presented.

[35] Basil Davidson, The Africans. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969), p. 295.

[36] Robert July, The Origins of African Thought. (New

Blyden was the first Black educator to suggest that African values not only had intrinsic merit within the African setting but that they were values which could make positive contributions to the global solidarity of mankind.[37] It could be rightly said that it was Edward W. Blyden who sowed the seed of negritude, which in recent years Leopold Sedar Senghor has been nurturing.[38]

Leopold Senghor has defined the concept of negritude in a variety of ways. But from the outset, he makes it clear that negritude "is not the defense of a skin or a color." He then goes on to positively define negritude as "the awareness, defense and development of African cultural values. . . . It is the awareness by a particular social group of people of its own situation in the world and the expression of it by means of the concrete image. . . . Negritude is democracy quickened by the sense of communion and brotherhood between men. . . . It is a part of Africanity; it is made of human warmth."[39] Perhaps the definition which best summarizes the concept is: "Negritude is the sum total of the values of civilization of

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York: Praeger, 1967), p. 217.

[37] E.W. Blyden, African Life and Customs. (London: C.W. Phillips and Co., 1908).

[38] L.S. Senghor, "African-Negro Aesthetics." In Diogenes, (No. 16, 1956), pp. 23-38.

[39] Leopold S. Senghor, Prose and Poetry. Trans. by J. Reed and C. Wake. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 96.

the African world."[40]

The ideological stance represented by the philosophy of negritude seeks to remove the "culture of silence," imposed by colonialism, which made the African apathetic to the issue of self-evaluation. It is a truism that the condition in which a people live ought to determine their mental form, their value system and the pattern of their emotional response. But the diffusionist colonial policy of education created an opposition between what the African child learned at school and his traditional home situation. Formal education, patterned on European models, robbed Africa and her people of their culture and took the word out of their mouth. An alien concept of man and an inappropriate world-view were imposed on the colonized; their creativity and self-expression were inhibited. In the words of J. Nyerere:

> We have been oppressed a great deal, we have been exploited a great deal, and we have been disregarded a great deal. It is our weakness that has led to our being oppressed, exploited and disregarded. Now we want a revolution - a revolution which brings to an end our weakness so that we are never again exploited, oppressed or humiliated.[41]

The philosophy of negritude, especially as enunciated by Leopold Senghor, as "the sum total of values of civilization

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[40] Leopold S. Senghor, Prose and Poetry. Trans. by J. Reed and C. Wake. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 97.

[41] Julius Nyere, Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism. (Dar-el-salem: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 18.

of the African world,"[42] could very well launch the ideological revolution which enables Black Africa to regain communion with her past intellectual productivity and creativity.

The concept of negritude is considered a very important part of this thesis, because it does help to form a philosophical construct of attitudes, such as self-esteem, aspiration, justice, tolerance; attitude towards authority and discipline and many more, among the young breed of Black Africans.

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[42] Leopold S. Senghor, Prose and Poetry. Trans. by J. Reed and C. Wake. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 96.

Chapter 5

TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF VALUE

Preamble

There are certain cross-cultural ethical universals that must be presumed to exist in all human societies. In the opinion of many anthropologists, it is false to assume that any human society, including the primitive, lack any kind of axiological problems.[1] Richard D.H. Niebuhr makes it clear that man as man is basically a moral actor, a "responder and an initiator," in a socio-historical process.[2] Man as a being of praxis, possesses the fundamentals of love, mutuality and creativity which are the basis of all value judgment and moral response. But the factors of heredity, culture, environment and the level of education do make a difference in individual moral development. Although it is impossible to set a universal human standard of what a mature adult's moral development ought to be, Lawrence Kohlberg has put forward the hypothesis of the "six sequential stages of moral growth."[3]

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[1] Paul Radin, Primitive Man as Philosopher. (New York: Dover Publications, 1957).

[2] Richard D. Niebuhr, The Responsible Self. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 69-144.

[3] Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education." In Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches. (ed.). (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 23-92.

Environment and education play very dominant roles in Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Peter Chirico, on the other hand, argues strongly in favor of the proposition that "man's moral stature is shaped by the age and culture in which he lives."[4] While affirming that man is endowed with a set of basic human qualities, Chirico insists that these qualities do not exist in a vacuum. He writes:

> These qualities only exist in a given age and a given culture. That age and culture affect, shape and modify - though never destroy - the above mentioned qualities. Just as each act of man helps form his character by modifying these qualities as they exist in him, so too the characteristics of an age or culture leave their effects on him. Thus, in a sophisticated age, the average man will face more complex value judgments and develop a more complex moral attitude (for better or for worse) toward the world about him. He will be quite different than he would have been had he lived in a primitive society.[5]

The human condition in which the traditional African lives is determined by his culture and environment. And this human condition shows through in all his behavior, coloring his entire life with value and meaning. So when it comes to the question of what the traditional scale of value is, account has to be taken of the human condition. This is because man envisages as a value only what affects him in his existential condition. In other words, a moral ideal is perceived as a function of the human condition which the African apprehends in a given situation. The determination of what is ideal does

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[4] Peter Chirico, "Tension in Morality." In Philosophical Studies. Winter 1965, No. 66, p. 260.

[5] Peter Chirico, Ibid.

not depend on any abstract analysis, but on the concrete "here and now" condition of his human existence. Thus, Henri Maurier has observed that:

> A gatherer will be particularly concerned with the good use or spoiling of the goods which the "Owner" puts at his disposal. A hunter is attentive to beauty, prestige, physical strength and bravery - all values which enable him to be successful in hunting. . . . In short, values and moral categories elaborated on the basis of a particular apprehension of existence, are inserted into an ideological, cultural, economic and psychological complex.[6]

The scale of value differs and is dictated by the urgency and priority of events as they are experienced in the community. Thus, for example, if the fertility of a couple is at stake, polygamy, divorce or even adultery appear normal. Also, the ritual sacrifice of a maiden, meant to insure the fertility of the soil, is legitimately performed by the local diviner or priest on behalf of the community.[7] But individuals may never take the life of their fellow tribesman or woman. It does seem that long before Joseph Fletcher, the African has always had his own theory of "situation ethics."[8] The traditional society did not have any moral absolutes, there were no abstract codes of value.

The Eternal Source of Values

There has always been a strong conviction among the

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[6] Henri Maurier, A New Covenant. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), p. 149.

[7] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 119.

[8] Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics: The New Morality.

peoples of Black Africa, that it is God who gives and upholds the moral law, and thus is the source of all values.[9] The role of God in traditional African value system has been generally underestimated. It has to be reiterated that the traditional African's acknowledgment and worship of a multitude of minor gods enhances, rather than detracts, from his belief in a supreme God. In traditional theology the supreme God is so unique, so magnificent in splendor, so terribly powerful and so transcendent, that no mortal man can dare to approach him directly. The supreme God is very remote and unapproachable. Thus the minor gods and ancestors become intermediaries between God and man. If the minor gods and ancestors are worshipped, placated and revered, it is so that they may continue to be contented mediators and obtain more and more favors for their clients. The missionary-educator did not understand this belief system. For him, the Judeo-Christian God is a jealous God, who tolerates no rival minor gods. So it was that no matter how a few handful of the early educators tried to appreciate and retain some indigenous values, such educators were haunted by the terribly resentful God of the Christians. The colonial educators kept emphasizing that the Christian religion and Western values were the only way to human dignity; and every effort was made to abolish the traditional customs and value system because

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(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

[9] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 146-150.

they were supposed to be "rooted in paganism." The educators believe that there is only one God, whose will is revealed in the Christian religion and Western values; for this reason, the ideal thing to do was to make traditional African religions and values capitulate to Western civilization.

A very interesting point raised by T. Westermann, asserts that although the African recognizes that the principles of good and bad are rooted in God, yet his assent to the moral demands of God:

> is no more than a Platonic acknowledgement; it is not a sanction which guides him in his actions, because moral obligations and values are rooted in social bonds, not in God.[10]

Commenting on the absurdity of Westermann's assertion, J.B. Danquah intimates that he (Westermann) would have the African say, in effect, "I know God expects me to be good, but I would be good irrespective of God."[11] The fact is that although traditional value pattern hinges on an elaborate system of sanctions (built around the ancestors) yet there is no doubt that God is explicitly recognized as the moral ideal.[12] Everywhere in Black Africa, according to Adeolu Adegbola, social values and morality may be founded on a variety of sanctions:

> But the most fundanemtal sanction is the fact that God's

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[10] Westermann, quoted in The Akan Doctrine of God by J.B. Danquah. (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 14.

[11] J.B. Danquah, Ibid., p. 15.

[12] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief.

> all-seeing eyes scan the total areas of human behavior and personal relationships. . . . Those who do evil in the dark are constantly warned to remember that God's gaze can pierce through the darkness of human action and motive.[13]

Because of the important intermediary roles played by the lesser gods, ancestors and so on in the traditional value structure, the remaining portion of this chapter examines nature, the ancestors, the king and the role of the community conscience.

Nature

While discussing the African concept of causation, reference has already been made to the pre-eminent respect accorded to nature.[14] Here it suffices to identify with the thoughts of Henry Zentner in his observations about nature as a source of value among North American Indians. He states that the traditional world-view does not look for the principle of causation "somewhere up in the sky, over and above man and nature." He continues: "Nature is herself regarded as the great creative force, the great transcendent causal principal, the inexhaustible source of order and genesis in both life and society."[15] It is religion which enables the tribesman to

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(New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 48-56.

[13] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs. (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 166.

[14] See Chapter 3.

[15] Henry Zentner, "Traditional Notion of Time." (Calgary: Unpublished University of Calgary Paper, 1976), p. 11.

accomplish the task of integration with nature. The tribal gods are all associated with different phenomenon of nature. There is an urge to maintain close contact with nature, with a pantheon of natural gods. In this context, Mircea Eliade has made the following observation:

> The divine remoteness actually expresses man's increasing interest in his own religious, cultural and economic discoveries. Through his concern with hierophanies of life, through discovering the sacred fertility of the earth, and through finding himself exposed to religious experiences that are more concrete, primitive man draws away from the celestial and transcendent God. The discovery of agriculture basically transforms not only primitive man's economy but also and especially his economy of the sacred. Other religious forces come into play - sexuality, fertility, the mythology of woman and the earth and so on. Religious experience becomes more concrete, that is, more intimately connected with life.[16]

For example, all farmers throughout the length and breadth of Black Africa are committed to the earth-goddess, (her name differs from tribe to tribe) who dictates most of the farmers' social relationships. Charles K. Meek, who has worked extensively in Africa, has described the role of the Igbo earth-goddess, "Ala" as follows:

> Ala is both the spirit of the earth and also the queen of the underworld, ruling the ancestors who are buried in the earth. In addition she is the source of all values, she is the giver and administrator of moral laws, and priests are guardians of public morality on her behalf. Oaths are sworn in her name and she is invoked in law-making. Crimes such as murder, theft, adultery and poisoning . . . are offences against Ala. . . . Ala is, in fact, the unseen president of the community, and no group is complete without a shrine to Ala. The common possession of a shrine to Ala is, indeed, one of the strongest integrating forces and source of community life

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[16] Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane. (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 125.

in Igbo society.[17]

The Ancestors

The ancestors underpin the life and strength of the kinship and lineage structure. The ancestors bring misfortune to those who betray lineage values and fortune to those who promote them. John Mbiti has pointed out how the ancestors are considered to act as intermediaries between God and man.[18] They are the guardians or police of tribal values, morals and customs. Where the ancestors were once great heroes or founders of a tribal community, it is commonly believed that they delivered many of the values, laws and customs of that tribal group.

The ancestors are feared, fed and feted. Because they are buried in the ground, they assure fertility; thus becoming the important and influential link in the chain of life which connects one generation to another. Any breach of tribal values and time-honored traditions constituted an insult to the ancestors.

The ancestors play a tremendous role in stabilizing the traditional value system, because the king who is the visible wielder of authority in the community, gets his power from the ancestors. K.A. Busia, in a comment that is true for

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[17] Charles K. Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe. (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 25.

[18] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 207.

all of Black Africa, writes:

> The whole legal and political system of Ashanti is bound up with ancestor-worship, which provides an organic unity between political and religious authority. Ancestor worship is the basis of the king's (chief) authority as well as the sanction of values and morality in the community. . . . The king (chief) is the one, who sits on the stool of the ancestors.[19]

The King

In his book entitled 'Traits of Divine Kingship in Africa,' P. Hadfield has shed much light on the concept of kingship in Africa.[20] Max Weber has applied the terminology charisma to:

> certain qualities of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.[21]

The traditional African king is considered as charismatic in the sense that he possesses supernatural power. The king is regarded as a sacred person because "he represents the order of being, their consistency and their fertility as an emanation of higher power."[22] In order to live his life and wield his authority effectively, the king becomes, as it were, grafted

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[19] K.A. Busia, The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 134.

[20] P. Hadfield, Traits of Divine Kingship in Africa. (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).

[21] Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. (New York: The Free Press, 1947), pp. 353 ff.

[22] Henri Maurier, The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newmann Press, 1968), p. 147.

onto divinity. The considerable power and authority of the king is epitomized by Henri Maurier, who notes:

> The king is the stabilizer of the cosmos and the living embodiment of life. . . . It is comprehensible that he is accorded divine honors, not by a vulgar anthropolatry, but because the king is typically a hierophany of the divine.[23]

The king is the living embodiment of local authority. He possesses charismatic authority, therefore he can lay down the societal code of behavior. Authority, according to John Mbiti, is recognized as increasing from the youngest child to the highest being. It also has degrees so that some of it is in the hands of the household-family, some is invested in the elders of the tribe, but it is the king, above all others, who possesses the highest authority among the living members of the community.[24]

Max Weber has established two basic categories of authority, namely: authority based on a legal-rational system and authority which is traditional-charismatic.[25] The justification for a legal-rational system of authority is based on the legality of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rule to issue commands. On the other hand, the justification for

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[23] Henri Maurier, The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newmann Press, 1968), p. 148.

[24] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 206.

[25] Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. (New York: The Free Press, 1947), Chapter iii.

traditional-charismatic authority rests on the established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under them.[26] Before the advent of colonialism, the African king had traditional-charismatic authority. He could demand and obtain obedience to his orders by virtue of his being both the religious and political leader of his tribe.

The value crisis which is being experienced in Black Africa today reflects the breakdown of the fundamental and traditional justification of the authority of the king. The frightful question that the educated youths are asking today is: "Why should one obey the king or, indeed, follow the traditional customs?" As John Mbiti has aptly put it, the authority and respect which the king, the elders and parents "enjoyed under traditional morality and customs are being challenged by the younger generations and in many homes there is rebellion by children against their parents."[27] The colonial school system has given birth to a new breed of young men and women, who are neither at home with their own traditional value structure nor with the imported Western values. These young people collectively pose a challenge to any form of traditional authority, especially that of the king. First, the sovereignty of the tribal king was removed by the

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[26] Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. (New York: The Free Press, 1947), p. 301.

[27] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 225.

colonizers, then the missionary-educators persuaded their converts not to look to their tribal king but to the Christian "king of kings" for values to live by. The portent and formidable problem that Western and Christian values present, especially to the traditional concept of kingship, is explained by K.A. Busia as follows:

> The cleavage centers around two questions: Belief and the Liberty of the Christian. They are both political as well as religious questions. . . . To recognize the existence of Christians in the community, the king must surrender to the Church his traditional authority as a religious head. This is the problem which christianity presents.[28]

The Community Conscience

Last, but by no means the least of the traditional sources of value, is what we would like to call the community conscience. In the traditional African society where the sense of corporate life is so deep, it is inevitable, says John Mbiti, that the solidarity of the community must be maintained, otherwise there is disintegration and destruction. Mbiti continues:

> This order is conceived of primarily in terms of kinship relationship, which simultaneously produces many situations of tension since everybody is related to everybody else, and deepens the sense of damage caused by the strain of such tensions. If a person steals a sheep, personal relations are at once involved because the sheep belongs to a member of the corporate body, perhaps to someone who is a father, or brother or sister or cousin to the thief. As such, it is an offence against the community and its consequences affect not

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[28] K.A. Busia, The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 136.

> only the thief but also the whole body of his relatives.[29]

In recent years, a new force has arisen in psychology which tries to integrate human actions and sociality in a contract model of psychology. The position of the proponents of "contract psychology," is very briefly summarized in the following sentence: "Man as a social being prospers or perishes as a function of how well he manages to fulfill himself in the society."[30] In other words, man prospers if he is able to achieve an integrated and productive life with others; whereas, for the man who is uncreative, alienated and anti-social, life is a meaningless bore. So it is that although man is free and to a large extent, self-determined, he nevertheless is far from being self-sufficient; he can only find ultimate fulfilment and self-realization in the company of and in cooperation with members of his community.[31]

The traditional notion of community conscience expresses the same general viewpoint as contract psychology. In the traditional community, there is less emphasis on individualism, as the well-being and self-realization of the

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[29] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 205.

[30] Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being. (New York: Harper, 1959). Also see William Glasser, Reality Therapy. (New York: Harper, 1964).

[31] L.S. Senghor, On African Socialism. (New York: Praeger, 1964).

one is the concern of the many, of the entire tribal community. Such immoral practices as incest, theft and so on, are looked upon as a breach of the social contract; it is the entire community that is offended; it is the lives of all the group-members that have been threatened. Hence, it is to the community at large that any anti-social elements must confess their "valueless" behaviors in order to insure personal well-being and the solidarity of the tribe. Henri Bergson's explanation of the demand of society on its individual members comes very handy here. Bergson explains:

> Society, present within each of its members, has claims which, whether great or small, each express the sum-total of its vitality. . . . A human community is a collectivity of free beings. The obligation which it lays down, and which enables it to subsist, introduce into it a regularity which has merely some analogy to the inflexible order of the phenomena of life.[32]

The tribesman who refuses to make social contracts, or who makes them and then secretly violates them, experiences life differently from the way in which responsible, cooperative members of the community do. Each tribal group has its own demands on its members, its own socially approved standards and its own concept of what is right and wrong. Any tribesman who is anti-social must face the tribunal of the community conscience.[33]

There is no doubt that in a closely knit corporate

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[32] Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion. (New York: Anchor Books, 1953), p. 11.

[33] Mary Douglas, Witchcraft: Accusations and Confessions. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971).

society where "I am because we are," where everything is organized by a system of sins, taboos and expiatory rites, that there can be over-reliance of the individual on his community. As a matter of fact, Joseph Mullin has observed that "the key to African society lies largely in the effacement of the individual before the collective. He will not, for example, take decisions without consulting the clan. Hence, the lessening of the sense of personal responsibility.[34] The sense of personal responsibility may, indeed, be lessened but, in the long run, the individual is still held responsible for his actions or omissions. It is very wrong to assume that the individual moral conscience is so completely submerged in and stifled by the community conscience that it is non-existent. There has been an assertion by Dournes to the effect that among the Africans, the reprobation of the tribal group takes the place of moral conscience. According to Dournes:

> If the group makes no reproach, the individual thinks himself just. . . . Stealing is no more a sin than driving in a forbidden direction; if the subject is not caught, his conscience remains silent, since it is only the reflection of a collective conscience which is ignorant of the act. If he is caught, he will be juridically responsible and will have to pay reparations and trial costs if he cannot justify himself before the tribunal. The notion of shame does not coincide with that of fault; the latter only involves shame if it is discovered.[35]

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[34] Joseph Mullin, The Catholic Church in Modern Africa. (London: G. Chapman, 1958), p. 28.

[35] Henri Maurier, The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), p. 153.

Dournes is wrong on two counts, namely, he is completely misinformed about the African concept of moral conscience and secondly, contrary to his assertion, the African always associates the notion of shame with that of fault or some wrong doing. Anyone who has witnessed the public confessions of wicked men and women, an occurrence which is still very common throughout Black Africa, cannot but be convinced of the mighty role that conscience plays in the individual life of the Africans. The wicked tribesman or woman cheats on society mostly in secret; he or she carries out infringements of societal values mostly in private. But it always comes to the inevitable stage when the voice of conscience becomes so loud it can no longer be subdued. Under the pressure of his wronged conscience, the cheat openly reveals his evil ways and begs the community members for pardon.[36] In traditional thought, conscience is commonly referred to as the faceless voice of God within man. It is believed that the creator implanted conscience in man as the most effective control of human conduct. The Yoruba tribe refer to conscience as "the witness of the stomach; to the secret evil doer it can and does become a tyrant. But to the good person, conscience is often likened to a guardian angel. Adeolu Adegbola has it that the man who tells a lie is reminded that his stomach is witnessing against him.

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[36] Mary Douglas, Witchcraft: Accusations and Confessions. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), p. 130.

Adegbola continues:

> A prick of the conscience is spoken of as a prick of the stomach. In the casting of lots, ordeal ceremonies or oath-taking, no one dares to take the diviner's potion whose stomach does not assure him that he is in the right; he must be one who can stand face to face with his stomach.[37]

While it is true that the community conscience does have tremendous influence, it does not follow that the reprobation of the group takes the place of individual moral conscience. Conscience is always there and always vigilant.

On the second count, Dournes is guilty of trying to universalize the neo-Freudian concept of shame. Erik Erikson, one of the best known exponents of neo-Freudian psychoanalysis, has categorized shame as an infantile emotion which comes into being at the anal stage of childhood development.[38] In contrast, shame within the African context is always regarded as an adult emotion. In traditional thought, because a child cannot be conscious of itself, it cannot feel shame. The sense of shame is linked with conscience, and there is shame as a result of one's awareness of some guilt or fault. Shame in the African frame of reference does not have anything to do with the concept of "toilet training." To feel shame means to experience a sense of guilt; only an adult is capable of being consciously

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[37] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs. (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 130.

[38] Erik Erikson, "Growth and Crisis of the Healthy Personality." In Personality, Nature, Society and Culture. (ed.). (New York: A.A. Knoff Inc., 1953), p. 199.

ashamed of anything.

In conclusion, it has to be noted that in practice, life for the African is a unity and he does not make any distinctions between his sources of value. He does whatever it is he must do to possess more and more vital force and self-fulfilment.

Chapter 6

AFRICAN CONCEPT OF MORALITY

What Does Moral Mean?

The wind of change is blowing through Black Africa, as industrialization is changing the mental attitudes, the mores, the value system and, in short, the social structures of the tribal communities. The old tribal and clan structures are doomed, however painful and slow the dissolution. African youth has to learn new values (not Western values) to be able to adapt to an industrialized urban life, where away from the tribal group and tribal sanctions, old values are abandoned and moral principles fall. John Wilson and a host of other writers believe that tribal ethics is conducive to tribal solidarity. But it is not easy to apply it in the changing situation where urban society requires its own set of morals suited to its type of life. Perhaps what is needed is not simply a re-definition of the old morality in the light of changing times, but an inauguration of a new morality rooted in traditional philosophy. It is in this light, the question is being asked: 'What is moral'?

A person's behavior towards his fellow human beings and his value judgments concerning his conduct are usually adjusted to a table of moral principles. Traditional African morality imposes upon all the members of the tribal

community an unconditional demand to do good and avoid evil.[1] The good done by the individual leads to the growth and solidarity of the community; any evil perpetrated by a member of the society has adverse effect on the entire community. The traditional moral law dictates that individual interests and preferences must always yield to the desires and preferences of the whole community. As has been pointed out in several other portions of this thesis, external pressure and tribal sanctions are the crucial, but by no means, the only criteria of morality; one's own consciousness of the sense of wrong-doing has to be taken into account. However, the moral principles of the individual tribesman or woman are easily identifiable with those which are, in fact, dominant in the conduct of members of the entire tribal community. In short, it is the society, or the "collective will" that prescribes moral standards based on the need for growth, happiness and so on, of the corporate society. Anything that the society regards as morally right is somehow beneficial to its individual members, while on the other hand, what is regarded as morally reprehensible is damaging to the society at large.

Cosmobiological Morality

Many Westerners often find themselves at a loss when confronted with traditional norms of morality. This is

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[1] J.D. Fage, Africa Discovers Her Past. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

because they are inclined to judge the African by Western standards. They often forget that the problem of right and wrong cannot be treated as having a monolithic, one-for-all answer. Values and moral standards develop in the course of a people's adaptive interaction with their environmental circumstances. Moral principles are born out of the conditions of life of any given peoples. What is morally acceptable in Africa may be morally repugnant to people outside of Africa. But very unfortunately, for many decades many educators in Africa became victims of their preconceived assumption that Black Africans have neither religion in the real sense, nor any philosophy to pattern their moral lives on. Placide Temples makes it clear that such a priori assumptions amount to simply turning "one's back on reality." He then goes on to write:

> If one has not penetrated into the depth of the Bantu personality as such, if one does not know on what basis they act, it is not possible to understand the Bantu. . . . One cannot make oneself intelligent to them. On the contrary, one runs the risk while believing that one is civilizing the individual, or in fact corrupting him - working to increase the numbers of the deracinated and to become the architect of revolts.[2]

The idea that stands out in Temples' insight is that one has to know the basis on which the traditional man acts, in order to understand his personality. As has already been explicated, religion plays a central role in the life and activities of the traditional African. To the illiterate

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[2] Placide Temples, Bantu Philosophy. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), p. 16.

tribesman, the transcendent or the sacred is simultaneously attractive and frightening, good and often the cause of evil. Ulli Beier explains this religious aspect of morality as follows:

> The African is convinced that every idea, every human being and every divinity are in potency equally good and evil. The secret of wisdom is not to separate artificially the good grain from the weeds, but to bring it all into the barn of the community's existence.[3]

Traditional morality is not based on abstraction; neither is there any formal categorization of good and evil. All those actions that conform to the order of the cosmos are normal and good, while any behavior that goes contrary to the cosmic order is evil and to be detested. Ethnologists have elaborated on this aspect of African morality and have come up with the name "cosmobiological morality."[4]

Cosmobiological morality reveals a spiritual universe in which each aspect of the human condition is connected with a myth, a hierophany, a particular god, an ancestor or a king. Thus, in the words of P. Grelot:

> The man-woman relationship shows a first aspect, that of fertility; . . . human and animal sexuality as fertile power, finds here its archetype, and at the same time the source of its sacrality, its meaning and its raison d'etre. Its second aspect is that of love-passion, from this comes "the goddess-lover who makes concrete the sexual attraction by which woman seduces man." Finally, a third aspect, that of the marriage institution has the divine marriage as its archetype. And indeed a sacred

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[3] Ulli Beier, *Ancient Religions*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 60.

[4] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969).

> character has to be attributed to whatever touches life, sex or fertility; men have to try to bind this important domain of existence to the higher powers (or power) on which it depends, and to envelope the exercise of the generative powers in a network of ritual rules and prohibitions in order to protect it against profanations; they have to set institutional laws of society and of the family.[5]

The African situates his existence and human condition within a system of cosmobiological references. He lives in a world where nature often plays strange tricks on him; where good and evil co-exist. He is perplexed by the cruelty and agony of death, but he also realizes that life comes only through death; so he develops myths and rites about the rhythm of death and rebirth, and compares the power of the woman who gives birth to that of "mother-earth." In all of this, his chief preoccupation is not how to categorize good and evil, but instead, it is how to formulate a way of living, so as to be able to cope with all the conflicting cosmobiological experiences that surround him in his existential condition. As Henri Maurier has very masterfully put it:

> The common denominator of all these experiences is that the man feels his human condition as a reality torn between contrary tendencies. The Westerner is too used to thinking of life and things from an ethical point of view; he speaks too readily of doing good and avoiding evil, of virtues and vices, for him an immoral myth is a scandal. African man, involved in his human condition, begins by expressing in beliefs, myths and rites what he experiences of his condition. In this way, he forges for himself not moral models, but an expression of what he is and what is the reality that surrounds him. Man, who

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[5] P. Grelot, in The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), pp. 63-64.

> finds himself ambiguous, is placed in an ambiguous world. He is not freed of it and does not leave it; he has not overcome evil and disorder. In this sense we could say that he is in the clutches of the Powers and enslaved to them, that is, in a global reality where it is impossible to separate good from evil and order from disorder.[6]

The traditional man is not obsessed with ethical abstractions concerning the nature of good and evil. His only concern centres on how to fully realize what he is; and on how to live longer in and with his tribal group. He formulates myths and rites through which he can achieve the great objective in life - the possession of more and more vital force. This is the reason the African engages in certain ritual practices, such as sacrificial murder, orgies and so on; practices which exasperate the Western man. J. Cazeneave, in a treatise on traditional African rituals, maintains that these seemingly reprehensible practices and rites, always in one way or another, have meaning in terms of the human condition of the African. Even when these rites have become so formalized that they are performed "only to have peace, or to get rid of trouble or even simply to discharge a traditional obligation," they still continue to be valuable.[7] It is in the light of such understanding that many African rites that seem to violate basic norms of morality ought to be perceived. Until it was abolished by the colonial powers,

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[6] Henri Maurier, The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), p. 104.

[7] J. Cazeneave, quoted in The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), p. 49.

the ritual practice of sacrificing human beings for the welfare of the tribal community was not considered immoral;[8] and neither were orgies at certain seasons of the year. Self-realization and meaningful existence depended on such ritual practices. Once more, J. Cazeneave has made the following comment:

> When we analyze the essential principles of rites in the societies called primitive we notice that they answer to real need, that they have a function, despite their apparent incoherence, and this function brings one back to what is more general in the human condition. On the one hand, the actual object of a certain number of rites is to give man roots in a well-defined condition by virtue of a set of rules and to remove from him whatever gives the anguished feeling of being indetermined and devoted to freedom. That is what taboos are: they forbid contact with everything that symbolizes the unusual and abnormal, in other words, with everything that escapes the rules. Such too are the cathartic practices which eliminate the defilement that springs from this contact when the taboos have not succeeded in preventing it. Such again are the rites of passage which by repetition associated with purification, cure the inevitable impurity which is involved in becoming, in change, in the passage from one system of rules to another.[9]

So it is, that for the African brought under the sway of cosmobiology by his human condition, moral rectitude, good living and good conduct consist in ritual practices and periodic regeneration rites modeled on that of nature herself. There is an urge to do away with the old order and change it for a new; there is the compulsion to have nothing to do with anything that suggests stagnation, infertility and so on.

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[8] E.B. Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 119.

[9] J. Cazeneave, quoted in The Other Covenant: A Theology of Paganism. (New York: Newman Press, 1968), p. 49.

This is the reason, according to M. Eliade, that the traditional African marks the beginning of each new year with a series of regeneration rites, such as purgations, confession of wrong-doings, driving off of 'demons' and expulsion of evil out of the village.[10] There is also an interlude of carnival, when there is a reversal of the normal order:

> License is let loose, all commands are violated, all contraries are brought together, and all this is simply to effect the dissolution of the world, of which the community is a copy, and restore the primeval illud tempus which is obviously the mythical moment of the beginning (chaos) and the end (flood).[11]

What is important in Eliade's description of the carnival is that there is no question here, either of repeating this license or re-enacting the dissolution of forms in the ordinary everyday life of the tribesman. The everyday, ordinary life and daily conduct is governed by a completely different set of archetypes.

The observation of F.M. Bergougniox and J. Goetz in connection with the cosmobiological basis of traditional morality serves as a fitting summary of the foregoing subtitle. They have observed that given the human condition of the Africans under the power of cosmobiology, morality becomes no longer a relationship of person to person, rather

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[10] Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion. (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 298.

[11] Mircea Eliade, Ibid., p. 2.

people have to live and act with:

> a superior awareness of man's need to submit consciously and freely to law. But this law is not sanctioned by a legislator; there is no personal responsibility. One who does not integrate himself into the cycle of life by the rites is neither good nor bad: he does not exist. One who violates the laws of life, consciously or not, if a physical disorder reveals the fact, is eliminated by the society, not as guilty, but as dangerous; or at least the individual must evacuate the evil he has contracted by formulas accompanied by expectorations. This is the meaning of confession so widespread in agrarian civilizations.[12]

Praxeological Morality

African traditional religion is crumbling, and so is the closely knit family structure. In the words of Adeolu Adegbola:

> contemporary African society has witnessed a continuing disintegration of the structure of the old society and a weakening of the religious beliefs and practises cherished in the old communities.[13]

While research students and scholars continue to trace how particular moral values and sanctions have sprung out of the cult of this or that god, ancestor or king; the cults themselves are disintegrating. Hence the tie between traditional customs (especially religions) and morality has become strained. A morality founded on a cosmobiological basis strikes a discordant note to the urbanized city dwellers. Today there is an attempt being made to depart

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[12] F. Bergougniox and J. Goetz, Prehistoric and Primitive Religions. (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 208.

[13] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 119.

from the traditional approach of emphasizing the absolute dependence of traditional morality on ritual laws and practices. A new morality which is "immanent and intrinsic,"[14] is being researched. This morality of "dynamism" is based on the African concept of man as a being of praxis. It is a morality which is immanent in and intrinsic to man, as such it is able to stand firmly on its own against the swift wind of change currently brushing through Africa.

From the praxeological perspective, the purpose of practically every activity of the tribesman is to acquire vital force, to live strongly and to see that the vital force is perpetuated in his posterity. Hence praxeological morality is founded on the very ground of his being (existence). For not to acquire vital force is not only a sinful scandal, but more than that, it is to be "non-existent." Any person who does not strive to acquire vital force is said to be disrupting the otherwise normal flow of community life and his own personal integration. To the African, a person persists in living a life devoid of value is a non-being, that is, he is considered as having no human existence. As Adeolu Adegbola explains:

> Western thought holds a static, while Africa holds a dynamic concept of being. Western thought revels in abstract ideas; the African on the other hand, prefers to grapple with reality through word-pictures, verbal imageries and concrete ideas. The suggestion has been made that it is fundamentally this which inhibits a

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[14] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 120.

> number of Africans from allowing themselves to be converted to christianity, the fear that they will have to give up ritual practices and habits of life which are intended to make it possible for the individual and indeed, the society at large, to acquire vital force.
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> What has been said of conversion can be equally said of the ethical sense, ethical judgment and moral pursuit: they are related to the people's idea of what is being. Not until one has understood that for the African 'the ontologically good is the ethically good,' can one appreciate and understand the moral sense of the African and the direction of ethical pursuit. Failure to perceive this may have contributed to the general denial to the African of a sense of morality. It may have also been responsible for the fact that the study of the ethics of Africans has been considered by many a scholar to be not worth the trouble because as they assume, the material is non-existent.[15]

E. Bolaji Idowu join a handful of others in the sparse area of Africa value theory, in insisting on the importance that is traditionally attached to character formation.[16] Among the Yoruba tribe, the word 'iwa' has the double meaning of being or character. In the words of Adegbola:

> With the single word 'iwa,' the Yoruba sum up the ideas of being and morality. On the one hand, 'iwa' speaks of existence, availability, and reality; on the other hand, it speaks of character, conduct, habit and morality. The one suggests metaphysical, the other, ethical ideas; the one deals with ontological and psychological states, the other with moral values; the one denotes the idea of individual and corporate being, the other of both private and social morality. On the one hand, it speaks of an individual as existent, on the other hand, it examines the action of the individual both generically as character and specifically as conduct.[17]

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[15] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 118.

[16] E.B. Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 154-168.

[17] Adeoulu Adegbola, Op. Cit., p. 130.

The combination of 'iwa' and 'ewa' as understood in the expression: "iwa l'ewa,' is pregnant with meaning. It could mean being (iwa) is beauty or it could take on an ethical meaning, viz, character (iwa) is being. And midway between these two meanings, there arises yet another meaning deriving from the double interpretation of which 'iwa' and 'ewa' are both susceptible. Iwa is either 'being' or 'character,' while 'ewa' means either 'being' or 'beauty.' The expression 'Iwa l'ewa' could therefore be translated either as 'being is character' or conversely as 'character is being.' Arranged in a syllogistic format the expression 'Iwa l'ewa' would read like this:

Being is beauty
Character is being, therefore
Character is beauty.

It is a common belief in traditional Africa that no matter "however happy a person's destiny may be, if he has no character, it is lack of character that will ruin his destiny."[18] Also it is believed that "gentle character it is which enables the rope of life to stay unbroken in one's hand. . . . It is good character that is a man's guard."[19] Good character shows itself in the following ways:

Chastity before marriage and faithfulness during marriage,

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[18] E.B. Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 153.

[19] E.B. Idowu, Ibid., p. 154.

> hospitality, generosity, the opposite of selfishness, kindness, justice, truth and rectitude as essential virtues, avoiding stealing; keeping a covenant and avoiding falsehood; protecting the poor and weak, especially women, giving honor and respect to older people; and avoiding hypocrisy.[20]

A very essential ingredient of character is respect; respect for one's parents, respect for one's elders, respect for one's tribe and so on. It is strongly believed that a person who cannot respect other members of the community, cannot love or trust or feel any sense of shame or guilt.

In the praxeological framework, reality is chiefly considered from a moral point of view. According to Adeolu Adegbola, good and bad are predicated by existence. The fundamental nature of man as a being of praxis is moral. Morality is the essence of being and insofar as "being is beauty," to be is to be beauty, and to be beauty is to be. Not to be beauty is not to be, that is, non-existent.[21] Beauty is being used above as the equivalent of 'good character.' It is beauty or good character, in the words of Bolaji Idowu:

> that is the one thing which distinguishes a person from a brute. When the Yoruba says of someone, 'he acts the person' or 'he behaves as a person should,' he means that he shows in his life and personal relations with others the right qualities of a person. The opposite description is 'he is not a person, he merely assumes the skin of a person.' That means that the person is socially unworthy; in consequence of his

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[20] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy. (Nairobi: Heinemann Books, 1969), p. 204.

[21] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 120.

> character he is not fit to be called a person, even though he goes about in the semblance of one.[22]

Many words in African languages have an ethical meaning which is often lost in translating these words into a foreign language. It suffices here to look into the moral meaning attached to 'ori' (head) and 'osonu' (stomach). In Africa, a week after the birth of a child, the character of the 'ori' is sought and known. This rite is usually conducted by the divineer, or in some cases by the head of the family. The rite of knowing the 'ori' reveals a number of dos and don'ts the child is supposed to observe in order to have good character. In other words, a simple moral code of behavior is drawn up for the child and imposed on it on the authority of its 'ori.' There are those who are told that their 'ori' do not approve of anger or pride or jealousy and so on. When the children grow up they obey the rules imposed on them on the authority of their 'ori.' The moral demands of 'ori' extend to interpersonal relationship; thus a person who tramples on the rights of his fellow tribesman, or neglects his social obligations is said "not to consider his 'ori'."[23] Geoffrey Parrinder makes reference to the very significant role of 'ori' in traditional morality in the statement that follows: "The

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[22] E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 154.

[23] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 122.

head is the seat of decision, will and pride. An active man has an ardent head, a tenacious man is hard-headed."[24]

The stomach 'osonu' implies the concept of both the heart and moral conscience. A person whose behavior is unseemly and indecorous is described as 'alaironu,' that is, someone who has no stirring of 'osonu.'[25] Because his 'osonu' does not stir, he is considered ill-adjusted to life and to society; his character is questionable. A person who does not experience the stirring of 'osonu' is considered as having no moral awareness; and as such, he is compared to a doll; he is not a person because he lacks moral consciousness which raises man to the level of human existence. When the African pleads with someone to reserve consciousness in the inside (osonu), he is imploring that person to be aware of the moral implications of his actions. The stomach 'osonu' is regarded as the seat of the moral faculty; from 'osonu' all moral impulses proceed. As Adegbola explains:

> The most distinctive feature of the stomach, the seat of moralty, seems to be its hiddeness, its being inside the body. So, reference to the moral inside speaks of the hidden depths of human nature. Moralty is regarded as that which cannot be plumbed, but which alone can spring out in its own way to reveal itself either in pleasing characteristics which delight others or in bad-tempered reactions which offend others and lead oneself to

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[24] Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Psychology. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 133.

[25] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 124.

social misery.[26]

There is much for the modern philosopher of education to learn from both the cosmobiological and praxeological interpretations of morality. Instead of relying on Western models, moral education in Africa has to look to traditional ritual practices, traditional ontology and traditional praxis to find its foundation. The African judges his actions according to their conformity to the order of the cosmos; he takes for a rule of conduct whatever it is that he grasps as conforming to the principle of praxis. There is a sense in which the traditional African moral ideal could be described as a perfectionist value system whose motto is: "Do such things, and only those things, as will lead to the fullest development of your personality." It is a morality which affirms that not to possess moral character is not to exist.

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[26] Adeolu Adegbola, "Basis of African Ethics." In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (ed.). (New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 126.

Chapter 7

AXIOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

Traditional Concept of Education

It is very erroneous to assume that there was no system of education in Black Africa before the coming of the European colonizers. This point was abundantly clarified at the Conference on Christian Action in Africa, (Otterbein College Westerville, Ohio: June 1942) part of the final statement read as follows:

> Pagan Africa had no schools as we know them, but it had a system of education, which while for the most part has been strangely ignored by Western educators, is by no means despicable. By formal and informal methods young Africans were trained to take their place in adult community. The accummulated culture of the past was transmitted to them. Technical training produced craftsmen of no mean order. Awareness of the existence of a creator, respect for elders, reverence for the ancestors, all the elements of a good life, as the Africans understood it, were inculcated. The aim was to educate the youth to become worthy citizens. As part of education, boys and girls were passed through ceremonies including instruction and discipline, which marked the end of childhood and their integration into the tribe.[1]

From the foregoing statement, it is easy to appreciate how the traditional concept of education implied the notions of teaching, training and conditioning. But for the most part, traditional education could be equated with socialization.

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[1] Christian Action In Africa: Report of the Church Conference on African Affairs. (New York: African Committee on the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, 1942), p. 37.

Within the African perspective, John Clausen gives a very apt definition of socialization as:

> the generic concept that embraces child-rearing, education, enculturation, role-learning, occupational preparation, preparation for marriage and parenthood and, indeed, all social learning that is relevant to one's group membership and life transition.[2]

The traditional African concept of education reflects what in modern terminology could be described as the "community-education approach to learning."[3] This approach regards education as a life-centred socio-cultural process, which is concerned with problem-solving to meet personal growth and the needs of the community. As Joseph Ki Zerbo notes:

> Education in the African countries cannot be conceived, simply from the standpoint of the pleasure of acquiring knowledge. The African tradition has been to regard education not as an epiphenomenon with respect to community activities, but rather as a preparation of the individual whereby he is enabled to take his place in the society as a full citizen.[4]

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[2] John Clausen, "Recent Development in Socialization Theory and Research." In Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. No. 377, (1968), p. 139.

[3] Edward G. Olsen, School and Community. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1954).

[4] Joseph Ki Zerbo, "The Content of African Education." Report of the Conference of African Status on the Development of Education in Africa: Addis-Ababa. (Paris: Unesco Publications, Annex iv, 1961), p. 55.

Cooperative responsibility was the key-word in the concept of traditional education, while its basis was the principle of praxis.[5] There were no designated teachers, no specially trained cadre of instructors. All the members of the tribal community were agents of education and each of them had his or her contribution to make towards the education of the youth. Thus the parents, extended family members, the elders and the peer group participated actively in the process of traditional education.

There was unity of theory and practice, as all learning tasks were derived from direct experience with people, concrete objects and real life situations. The learning of anything which is worthwhile was considered as educational. And the justification of worthwhile activity is that it contributes to the progress and moral growth of both the individual and the entire tribal community. Each new member of the community is taught, especially through vicarious learning, to act appropriately, to have good character and to contribute to the maintenance and improvement os societal values. Knowledge had to do with everyday realities, as the youths were educated through their day-to-day work and play to be well-rounded adults and ethical participators in the life of the community. We could aptly describe traditional education in the wrods of A. Moehlman, as

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[5] Walter Rodney, "Education in Africa and Contemporary Tanzania." In Education and Black Struggle. (ed.). (Boston: Harvard Education Review, No. 2, 1974), pp. 82-99.

> a life-long process of directed learning which enables both the individual and society to use the past's treasure of cultural inheritance, to operate effectively the institutions of the present, and to plan and invent wisely for the future.[6]

Aim of Traditional Education

Traditional African education had as its objective, the teaching of human values and the molding of character Education was regarded as the art of forming young ones, of helping them to develop all their human potentials so they are able to grow into mature adults, ready for the sequel of life. Although the traditional hierarchy of values is situational, the following artificial order is distinguishable:

personal value = health and strength;
social value = law and order; peace and solidarity;
moral value = acquisition of vital force through right conduct.

From the traditional frame of reference, all human existence is about the acquisition of the vital force. For this reason, human values constituted the orbit around which traditional education revolved. A.B. Fafunwa has stated that the end objective of traditional African education is "to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day."[7] Fafunwa then goes on to specifically outline the multilateral aims of

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[6] A. Moehlman, Comparative Education Systems. (Washington D.C.: Center for Social Research, 1963), p. 4.

[7] A.B. Fafunwa, History of Education in Nigeria. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 20.

traditional education as follows:

1. To develop the child's latent physical skills.
2. To develop character.
3. To inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority.
4. To develop intellectual skills.
5. To acquire specific vocational training and develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour.
6. To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
7. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.[8]

The ultimate goal of traditional education coincided with the acquisition of the vital force. In other words, the indispensable aim of traditional education did not lie in the accumulation of knowledge for its own sake, but in the promotion of the self-perfection, self-realization and self-integration of the tribesman.[9] Traditional education was structured in such a way that it could provide the tribesman with the means of realizing the best of his potential powers. In this respect, Arthur C. Fleshman makes a point which deserves better attention than it has heretofore received; he

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[8] A.B. Fafunwa, History of Education in Nigeria. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 21

[9] Colin G. Wise, A History of Education in British West Africa. (New York: Longmans Green, 1956).

notes:

> Self-realization is the aim in ethics and education. The end of life must be a development in character. . . . The final problem in ethics and the ultimate aim in education must be tested in terms of the realization of the rational self. The supreme law of every educational process is to make the best of self possible. The pupil is to develop his own personality to the fullest extent and in doing so he is to assist in the development of other personalities associated with him.[10]

Traditional education was guided by the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number of people; there was neither the spirit of competition nor individualism. All the members of the tribal community were always conscious of their common destiny. "Africa is essentially a country of community government;" writes Ahmed Sekou Toure, "collective life and social solidarity give its habits a fund of humanism which many peoples might envy. It is also because of these human qualities that a human being in Africa cannot conceive the organization of his life outside that of the family, village or clan. The voice of the African peoples has no features, no name, no individual ring."[11] In spite of its pre-paradigmatic nature, there is something that could be categorically affirmed about traditional education: it was embedded in the African culture. Traditional education was the powerful instrument of culture maintenance and improvement; it was the medium of enculturation

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[10] Arthur C. Fleshman, The Educational Process. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1908), p. 125.

[11] Ahmed Sekou Toure, Political Leader as the Representative of a Culture. (New York: Jihad Productions, n.d.), p. 7.

and optimum development of the latent potentials of each new member of the tribal community.

Perspective on Colonial Education

With the advent of colonialization and the introduction of formal education into West Africa,[12] there was a drastic change in the philosophy of education. The aim and content of education became foreign imports and the teaching of Western culture and values became the order of the day. The philosophy underlying the colonial policy of education was grounded in discipline and social control. The words of G. Harrison provide the most appropriate introduction to this section of our studies:

> In the fear of God and the catechism lay the discipline that was needed in a situation of rapid change. . . . The role of the school is best seen as part of the total machinery of coercion that was used to limit disturbance and inculcate a new social discipline.[13]

In order to establish their intellectual and moral domination, the colonial masters subjected the Africans to a harsh socialization in the school system in which they were taught to be submissive and content with their status in life.[14]

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[12] F.H. Hilliard, A Short History of Education in British West Africa. (Edinborough: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957). Also see John D. Hargreaves, West Africa: The Former French States. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

[13] G. Harrison, quoted in Education and Modernisation. (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 134.

[14] A.B. Fafunwa, History of Education in Nigeria. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 84.

All notable historians of the spread of formal education in Black Africa attest to the fact that the manifest function of the school was to produce, at best, a poor imitation of the "Christian Gentleman."[15] For instance, R.J. Mason writes:

> The missionaries opened schools for two main reasons: they wanted all their followers to be able to read the Bible, and they wanted a few of their followers to have a greater knowledge so as to become teachers of the others. Some missionaries may have considered education a good thing in itself, but to all, the principal object of schools was as an aid to evangelization.[16]

The missionary-educators confronted the peoples of Africa with bull-dozers meant to tear down and smash the "barbarous" pagan value system, the "heathen" way of life and any trace of African mentality. In short, every effort was made to remove the Africans from their history, culture and even from their community. According to an account given by S. Phillipson, the early missionaries did create new communities that were known as "Reductions." Phillipson notes:

> These reductions were in effect model christian villages, the inhabitants of which had been withdrawn from the surrounding barbarianism in order to constitute a self-sufficient social unit of which the school was, of course, a part.[17]

All the Nigerians, Ghanians, Sierra Leonians, and so on, who

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[15] Cyril Norwood, The English Tradition of Education. (London: Cass, 1929), pp. 4-20.

[16] R.J. Mason, British Education in Africa. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 22.

[17] S. Phillipson and W. Holts, Grants-in-Aid of Education in Nigeria. (Lagos: Government Printing Press, 1948), p. 11.

passed through the colonial school system imbibed a depersonalizing colonial mentality. In this connection, Albert Memmi notes: "The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model (colonizer) and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him."[18] There was no limit to the extent to which the African had to give up his native wisdom, his rites, his customs, his name, his culture and his world-view, bartering all he is and all he has, in order to be like his colonial master. At school, the African was indoctrinated to despise his own culture, his own values and traditional way of life and to regard the colonizers' philosophy of life, values and ideologies as the only path to human dignity.[19] Sekou Toure illustrates this feeling, writing:

> There is no indictment to be drawn up against intellectualism, but it is important to demonstrate the depersonalization of the African intellectual, a depersonalization for which nobody can hold him responsible, because it is the price which the colonial system demands for teaching him the universal knowledge which enables him to be an engineer, a doctor, an architect or an accountant.[20]

Neither the British nor the French colonizers made enquiries or asked any questions about traditional African philosophy. No attempt was made to investigate the filial piety, the humanism

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[18] Albert Memmi, The Colonized and the Colonizer. (New York: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 120.

[19] Duodo Cameron, "African Personality." In Drum Magazine, September, 1961, pp. 31-32.

[20] Ahmed Sekou Toure, Political Leader as the Representative of a Culture. (New York: Jihad Productions, n.d.), p. 6.

and agalitarianism inherent in the tribal life style. Instead an educational policy based on a foreign cultural, religious and nationalistic pattern was imposed on the Africans. As Robert W. July points out:

> French nationalism stood for the superiority of French culture, and encouraged African colonies to assimilate French language and culture and to ignore and despise their own culture and history. . . . The very notion of assimilation involved a sense of cultural superiority and a humiliating unhumanitarian condescension.
>
> For her part, Britain was more subtle - as her written policy was to preserve the integrity of local customs. . . . But the Englishmen never ceased to point to the superiority of the British way of life and to assert their unshakeable belief that the world could only hope for general improvement appropriate to its degree of adaption of superior British standards.[21]

The colonial powers offered no apologies for the systematic and ruthless destruction of the African way of life. As Lord Frederick Luggard puts it, the British considered it an obligation to humanity to diffuse British values and ideology in all her African colonies. He writes:

> As Roman imperialism laid the foundation of modern civilization, and led the wild barbarians of these islands (Britain) along the path of progress, so in Africa today we are repaying the debt and bringing to the dark places of the earth - the abode of barbarism and cruelty - the torch of culture and progress.[22]

It was in the best interest of the colonial masters to destroy the philosophy and culture of the colonized. Because "for

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[21] Robert W. July, The Origins of African Thought. (New York: Frederick Praeger Press, 1967), pp. 31-32.

[22] Frederick Luggard, quoted in Education as Cultural Imperialism. (New York: David McKay, 1974), frontpiece page.

the cultural invasion to succeed," so writes Paulo Freire, "it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority." Freire continues:

> The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, talk like them . . .[23]

It is usually at the stage in the African child's life when he needs most the traditional social patterns to be incorporated into his personality that he goes to school. Tensions immediately develop as the child is bombarded with Western educative influence. K.A. Busia provides a richly suggestive overview of the changes an African child goes through when he first begins to attend the school:

> Consider, for example, the children who first go to school. They have to learn new ways. The whole rhythm of their life changes. They begin to live by the clock which regulates school life. Often they begin to wear clothes or school uniforms different from the clothes they are used to wearing at home; they are no longer able to work and play as before, with the other boys who do not go to school, for school hours impose limitations or compel a different routine; they are unable to share in mother's or father's work and learn at their side the activities which take place during the hours of school. . . . They come to have new needs; they make new demands on the home. . . . There are not only changes in habits, those who go to school learn new facts; school and home seem to pull apart.[24]

The school represented a definite discontinuity in the lives of the African child, because the philosophy underlying the colonial education was very different from the traditional way

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[23] Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 153.

[24] K.A. Busia, Purposeful Education for Africa. (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1964), p. 19.

of life. The Western world-view and concept of man which pervaded the educational system was foreign to the African traditional thought pattern. Hence, the school children undergo a gradual process of deculturation; a process whereby they are gradually cut off from their own history and cultural roots.

The Africans who lived tribal life and had their own system of education were not a deprived people. In fact, the uncolonized African lived lives of exceeding dignity and valued rewards, away from the trappings of Western civilization. Formal education has to be seen as a necessary contribution to the enrichment of African traditional education, not as a substitute.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

Is There An African Philosophy?

To set the stage for a reconstructed African philosophy of education, it is necessary to attempt a clarification of the question of African philosophy. Does Black Africa have a philosophy which is distinct from, for instance, Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy or Western philosophy? W.E. Abraham sketches the nature of the postulation with precision, writing:

> The question of the existence of an African philosophy is not a "uniqueness" question. There is no reason why, in order that there should be an African philosophy, it has to be different from every other philosophy. It is sufficient that philosophy should occur in Africa such that it is not derived from outside Africa.[1]

While admitting that philosophy is man's quest for meaning or for truth, it has to be emphasized that this quest is culturally and historically determined. Philosophical realities cannot but manifest themselves through the characteristics which belong to the existential milieu in which different peoples find themselves. The physical and human elements in philosophy can neither be ignored nor eliminated. The physical environment, the socio-historical condition and a host of other elements are

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[1] W.E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 104.

largely responsible for the unity in diversity in man's quest for meaning. As stated earlier in this thesis, the way the African thinks, the way he acts and in short, his entire life, is historically constituted. His understanding of himself and his place in the universe is manifested through the individual and collective experiences of the tribal clan. Thus, when an African philosophizes, these experiences become manifest as they color his world view. It is in this sense that we can truly talk about an African philosophy. W.E. Abraham very rightly points out that the fact that there is an absence of a body of philosophical writings among the Africans does not in itself mean the absence of philosophical ideas.[2] There are two main aspects of African philosophical speculation: the public and the private. The public philosophy usually traces out the theoretical foundations of the traditional society; while the private philosophy is more the thinking of an individual than a laying-bare of the communal mind.[3] Much of traditional African philosophy is of the latter kind. Thus within the African frame of reference, we can more readily identify an individual African philosopher rather than a repository of the public philosophy.

Man is educated in and for society; for this reason social values demand identification and clarification in matters

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[2] W.E. Abraham, The Mind of Africa. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p, 104.

[3] W.E. Abraham, Ibid., p. 105.

of educational policy. Philosophy of education could be defined very simply as the underlying ideas, values and principles which influence and shape educational policy. A philosophy of education attempts to produce some kind of theoretical scheme out of the social, cultural and daily axiological problems of any given human society. B.Y. Card refers to the element of philosophy as the "intellectual cement" while history, sociology and psychology of education constitute the "sand and gravel" which are used in the construction of the foundation of the educational edifice.[4] In agreement with Card, Joseph Adetoro describes philosophy as the basic and most strategic element in the whole structure. "It is in philosophical concepts and ideas," writes Adetoro, "that the basic attitudes and values which operate in a particular society are reflected."[5]

A people's educational policy is chiefly dictated by the particular concept of man and reality, and the value system operative in that society. In this regard, the philosophy of traditional education was based on the African cultural and historical conditions which provided the tribesman with a system of values. As I have mentioned elsewhere in this study, the primary aim of traditional education was to mold character;

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[4] B.Y. Card, in *ATA Magazine*. February, 1951, p. 19. Quoted in "The Changing Aims and Functions of Nigerian Education." cf. below.

[5] Joseph Adetoro, *The Changing Aims and Functions of Nigerian Education*. (Edmonton: University of Alberta unpublished Ph.D Thesis, 1965), p. 354.

education was value-oriented; the youths were educated for living and coping with the demands of community life. All of this changed with the advent of colonialization. The colonizers invaded and penetrated the cultural context of the traditional education policy. "In disrespect of the latter's potentialities," to adapt the words of Paulo Freire, "they imposed their own view of the world upon those they invaded and inhibited the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression."[6]

The colonial philosophy of education introduced a dichotomy between schooling, which became more of book-learning as an end in itself, and an education which prepared the young for mature adult life and for ethical participation in community affairs. The school endeavored to teach habits and skills and to impart knowledge outside the tribal cultural environment. As a result, the education given at school did not fit the young African to live in his traditional society. K.A. Busia states the case succintly, when he writes:

> The longer the children stay at school, and the more they learn, the further home and school seem to pull. This is so because they learn more about countries and peoples in far away Europe than about the needs and problems of their own home and kindred.[7]

Future Orientation

As Black Africa confronts reality in her search for

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[6] Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 150.

[7] K.A. Busia, Purposeful Education for Africa. (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1964), p. 20.

intellectual and moral freedom, she needs a philosophy of education which is based on the African past but geared towards her renaissance. This task can only be accomplished through a dynamic educational policy, that is geared to shaping the attitude, involvement, discipline, commitment and perspective of the African youth with a consistent ideological direction. Sekou Toure captures the gist of the African quest for authenticity, when he writes:

> Our incessant effort will be directed towards finding our own ways of development if we wish our emancipation and our evolution to take place without our personality being changed thereby. Every time we adopt a solution which is authentically African in its nature and its conception, we shall solve our problems easily, because all those who take part will not be disoriented or surprised by what they have to achieve, they will realise without difficulty the manner in which they must work, act and think.[8]

If the best of the traditional common pool of values is to be integrated into modern educational process, then it is important to first of all identify and clarify traditional concepts, rites and folkways. It is only as the educator makes the best use of the forms of thought and modes of action embedded in traditional African philosophy that there can be a solid foundation for an Africanized value-education. What I have tried to do in this thesis is to set out in certain perspective some relevant points about traditional African value systems, which I think ought to be the roots out of which transformation must take place.

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[8] Ahmed Sekou Toure, The Political Leader Considered as the Representative of a Culture. (New York: Jihad Publications, n.d.), p. 6.

This thesis is essentially an attempt to philosophize on value-education within the Black African context. It is not being assumed or claimed that Black Africa has a unique philosophy or a theory of value which is in no way related to non-African theories of value. What is being emphasized is that on account of differences in socio-historical realities, non-African modes of thought and theories of value are simply inadequate and do not exactly fit the African educational situation. The African, as has been pointed out in this thesis, uses his mental powers under the influence of different systems of socio-historical organizations and belief patterns than the non-African. So that even where a basic value is in question, the reason for the desirability or non-desirability of the value is usually reached through different assumptions and premises.

The conclusion to be drawn from this thesis is that through a critical confrontation between the African past and the present, an African value-education could be inaugurated which would combine the best values of the past with those of modern schooling. My task would have been accomplished if this thesis has succeeded in creating an awareness for a paradigm of value-education rooted in the very best of the traditional African way of life.

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